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"CANOPUS IN ARGOS:" DORIS LESSING'S SUFIST SCIENCE-FICTION
SERIES

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CANOPUS IN ARGOS: DORIS LESSING'S
SUFIST SCIENCE-FICTION SERIES

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the University of Alaska
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By
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Fairbanks, Alaska

May 1986

CANOPUS IN ARGOS: DORIS LESSING'S
SUFIST SCIENCE-FICTION SERIES

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ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing's quintet, Canopus in Argos, was heavily influenced by the author's recent conversion to Sufism. Using the science-fiction genre, Mrs. Lessing has created a series of Sufist "teaching tales" in order to obliquely illuminate some aspects of her mystical Islamic philosophy. The waste of potential that epitomizes the earth's "progress"--described socio-historically in Shikasta, philosophically in The Sirian Experiments, and politically in The Sentimental Agents--is contrasted with utopian tales of worlds in harmony with Canopus. Via Marriages' fantasy and Planet Eight's enlightenment through trauma, some Sufist beliefs and paths to "spiritual evolution" are suggested. Together, the series elucidates several dimensions of Sufist thought, and provides an insight into the latest stage in Mrs. Lessing's philosophical quest.

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More personally, should I offer thanks to Kate Troll for introducing me to Doris Lessing? The resulting obsession with interpreting Canopus in Argos' message has been responsible for this thesis. Well, at least we won't be social pariahs as much, huddling in the corner at parties arguing about the books' meanings.

And many thanks to Pam Hughes and Andrea Stalder.
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INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing became interested in the Sufi movement in the early 1970s as the mystical philosophy spread through western Europe. For the next decade, she immersed herself in the writings of Sufi masters and became a friend and follower of its primary spokesman in England, Idries Shah. From her investigations a series of five books emerged, written between 1978 and 1983, called Canopus in Argos: Archives. This quintet of space fiction stories may be read in several different ways: as utopian literature; as science fiction from a non-scientific viewpoint; as rather audacious, quite polemic tales; or as philosophical attempts to explain the history and errors of earth from an outsider's perspective. In fact, Canopus in Argos includes all of these points of view, none of which, however, completely captures the series' essence.

The interpretation which best preserves the unity of these books and provides a consistent theme throughout their widely varying narratives is gained by reading them from a Sufistic viewpoint. The Canopean Empire, whose actions affect the five worlds that the quintet describes, may be easily identified as the personification of a Sufist ideal, an unseen spiritual kingdom that has achieved perfect harmony. Canopus' attempts to introduce its philosophy to the unenlightened inhabitants of Argos universe's many worlds

provide the framework for Lessing's multiple interpretations of Sufist thought. A contemplation of this mystical philosophy dispels the series' seeming disjointedness, and creates a spiritual parable of despair and hope on earth.

While Sufism is relatively unknown in the West, it is not a new philosophy. Most religious scholars trace its origins back to the beginning of Islam. Sufism is widely accepted by academics to have begun as a mystical offshoot of Muhammad's teachings, a search for salvation within the seeker rather than through an external savior. While the traditional belief of Islam is in an "emphatically transcendent and omnipotent God" (Bowering 132), scholars trace Sufism to a second, more diffuse school of thought which was emerging concurrently with traditional Moslem belief. However, many Sufis argue that academic scholars lack the initiates' knowledge and are in error concerning the movement's origins. They state that their faith predates the rise of Islam and all other major religions; indeed, that Sufism should be understood as the basic fact underlying all religions and schools of philosophy which seek an Eternal Truth. Masters contend that signatures and codes recognizable as Sufist have been found in various literature dating as far back as 2000 B.C., and have been traceable throughout all succeeding centuries. Sufist philosophy first emerged openly in the mid-East regions between the eighth and the eighteenth centuries A.D., where it had its greatest

impact on civilization (Graves viii). However, it has only been within the last two centuries that Sufism has surfaced in western countries, as their cultures have become more tolerant of Eastern philosophies.

In the 1960s and 70s, a vocal proponent of western Sufism emerged in the person of Idries Shah. A direct descendant of Muhammad, Shah moved from Afghanistan to London when he was thirty-one and soon thereafter began his teachings concerning the Sufist philosophy in England (Courtland 94). Since that time, he has attracted many students, and his blending of Sufist thought with Western culture has been openly investigated by both academia and the popular media.

While Sufis claim that it is impossible to fully understand the concepts of their philosophy without studying with a Master, certain generalized statements concerning Sufism's beliefs are available to the public. Such beliefs do not require specific cultural perspectives, and in fact Sufis state that all such biases must be discarded before any measure of true comprehension can result.

Sufism is seen as the kernel of truth that exists in all religions and philosophies which seek to explain existence; however, it supersedes the limitations which most all religions impose as requirements for belief. It cannot be systematized or organized into any one form or ritual because, like time and man's perceptions, it is continually changing. If any master proposes a systematic plan of Sufist

study or espouses an established philosophy for his students to follow, he automatically exposes himself as a false teacher. Sufist study must be an individualized procedure, and the method of learning depends on each student's level of understanding.

The ultimate goal of humanity, according to Sufist teaching, is a vaguely described "perfection" of mankind, both individually and communally (Foster 127); the reaching of a level of total understanding and communion with mankind, in a form of "absorption with the theme of love" (Graves xv). The student himself should ideally be able to achieve this by a self-directed evolution through various stages of development. This evolution is achieved through study, a stripping away of false illusions and cultural stereotypes, and the development of "higher organs of perception" (Foster 127). As one Master explains:

Sufism is taught, first, by example and by talking and acting as a Sufi; secondly and practically, by a master training disciples and passing on his knowledge, point of view, and exercises of many kinds in accordance with their needs. (Martin 144)

This teaching is accomplished, not in an atmosphere of retreat from the outside world, but by embracing every aspect of life. Sufism does not encourage ascetic or monastic actions, but rather insists upon the importance of practical experience and involvement with the student's own surroundings. Evolution toward a higher level of development will involve the individual primarily, but his example must also help enlighten the world around him and prove an

example to mankind in general; as Graves states in his introduction: "Metaphysics . . . are useless without practical illustrations of prudent human behavior" (xvi).

Because of this emphasis on practicality, Sufis may be found in almost any type of job or stratum of society, spreading their ideas in many different ways, such as through literature or scientific, philosophical and medical discoveries, as well as through personal example. Since public teaching is anathema to Sufism, ideas must be demonstrated through the attitudes implicit in a Sufist's work or writing, as well as through his life. Some of the more famous recent Westerners who have acknowledged their familiarity with Sufist thought and literature have been the late Secretary-General of the U.N. Dag Hammerskjold, psychologist Erich Fromm and explorer Sir Richard Burton, poets Walt Whitman and Ted Hughes. In addition, scholars assert that many medieval Christians were familiar with and demonstrated their support of Sufist tenets: among them being such figures as St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and St. Francis of Assisi, as well as groups such as the Knights Templars and the Order of the Garter (Foster 131-32). While working within their own spheres of influence, all embodied and spread Sufist concepts in ways that were pertinent to their own particular disciplines.

Among the many ways that Sufists have spread their message, one common method frequently seen but rarely

recognized is the "teaching story," written in a deliberately open-ended style which encourages the reader to interpret its meaning in new ways. Such a story can be understood on several levels, from the simple tale to a richly complex allegory, each level offering possibilities for insight into philosophic truth. "Aesop's Fables" and "A Thousand and One Nights," as well as the Muslim mullas' tales are considered to be among the most classic teaching stories (Graves x), but others are always being invented as need arises.

Doris Lessing is also credited by several critics with being a creator of teaching tales in her literature. While providing a story which can stand on its own, she also frequently incorporates thoughts taken from the Sufist philosophy:

Lessing's story, like those of the Sufic teachers, is designed to lead its audience to the perception of a hidden harmony among elements of life that initially appear to be incongruous . . . a way of seeking to lift the veil of appearance that masks true Being. (Drane 93)

From that background of Sufist theories comes Doris Lessing's science-fiction series, Canopus in Argos. Each book in the quintet is a tale which is complete in itself, yet which also links with the other books to create a total picture, illuminating Lessing's Sufist philosophy.

One of the first, and initially surprising facts concerning Canopus in Argos, is why Lessing chose the science fiction, or more exactly, the space fiction genre.

Known by reputation as a writer of the most detailed, realistic assessments of the human condition, in Canopus in Argos she seemingly rejects the firm humanist viewpoint whose position she has previously espoused. However, this series of books is a logical evolution of Lessing's writings, whose themes have traditionally reflected the stages of her ever-changing beliefs. Lessing's move into outer space is merely the latest stage of her attempt to free her writing from the restrictions that conventional literature and conventional thought impose.

In the early 1970's, Doris Lessing began investigating Sufism. From the position of this new philosophy, she began to re-evaluate her theories of sanity and madness, of free will and of salvation for humanity, and to incorporate these theories, ever more openly, into her books.

In several of her novels since that time, she has dealt with a concept of dual worlds which meet in her supposedly lunatic protagonists' thoughts. Lessing's characters have been increasingly conscious of being touched, and even being somehow directed by an external force that offers them some hope of salvation in, and from, this unbalanced world. Hints of this emerging viewpoint are first seen in Martha Quest, from Lessing's Children of Violence quartet. The theme is amplified in The Golden Notebook and becomes a major topic in the dual worlds of Briefing for a Descent into Hell. In Canopus in Argos, Lessing finally shifts entirely to her new viewpoint--a move from the human mind

seeking an intuited salvation, to the saviors' own perspective, as they look down onto the struggling creatures that inhabit this earth.

By developing her stories within space fiction's "larger scope, with more capacious possibilities and themes," as Lessing states in Shikasta's preface (ix), she discards the constraints of a conventional novel, leaving the author "free both to be as experimental as I like, and as traditional . . . breaking the bonds of the realistic novel" (ix-x). Within Canopus in Argos' five books, Lessing creates an entirely new universe in order to illuminate uncomfortable truths about this world, using the viewpoint of Sufist philosophy. Lessing's last direct words to the reader before he enters Shikasta set the tone of Canopus' series when she suggests that:

The sacred literatures of all races and nations have many things in common. Almost as if they can be regarded as the products of a single mind. . . . there are even those who have come to believe that there has never been more than one Book in the Middle East. (x-xi)

The five books which comprise Canopus in Argos each approach their description of Sufist perfection and earthly failure from a slightly different angle. Shikasta introduces Canopus through the multiple narratives which that history book of earth includes. Between the emissaries' objective view of hope for man's eventual enlightenment and Shikasta's own perspective as described by its embattled inhabitants, a bitter picture of spiritual defeat is sketched. Shikasta becomes a study of potential salvation reflected

against a view of paradise lost. Its final note, however, is not despair but the hope that is still available for mankind if he is willing to struggle toward the richer existence that Sufism offers.

The second and fourth books provide striking contrasts to Shikasta's bleak scene of human failure. The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five is a utopian fantasy of Sufist success and harmony. Its portrayal of the reluctant but successful marriages between adjacent countries' rulers becomes a fable of spiritual education. The successive levels of wisdom that Marriages' zones represent offer views of hope for man's eventual enlightenment--spiritually, mentally, and socially.

Similarly, but more traumatically, The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight offers another picture of successful spiritual evolution, this time through the darker perspective of death. Planet Eight's tale of a world's destruction from ice becomes a study in metamorphosis into newer, better forms of existence. Using the clinical stages of preparation for death, Lessing describes still another path of evolution into infinitely better worlds of Sufist potential which lie beyond man's self-limiting fear of the unknown.

Contrasting with these successful tales, the series' third book, The Sirian Experiments, returns to a picture of self-deluded worlds whose chaos is caused by their spiritual blindness. The Sirian Empire, with its trust in the hollow

philosophy of technology and materialism, is an allegory of Western society in need of Sufism's worthier vision. The unwitting education of Ambien, one of Sirius' rulers, into Canopean wisdom parallels the initial stages of a student's initiation in the Way of Sufist thought. Through her enlightenment, Ambien holds the key to salvation for her people, as she explores the possibilities that Sufist insight offers for all of mankind.

Paralleling the less optimistic picture that Experiments presents, Canopus in Argos' fifth book--Documents Relating to the Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire--creates one final picture of worlds wracked by conflict and self-delusion. Agents is a satire on the power of false rhetoric and futile politics to blind humanity to the more pacific, judicious direction that Sufism offers. The tiny empire with its hostile planets seemingly doomed to never-ending conflict becomes an ironic look at European politics, an empire lacking the rational approach to existence that Klorathy, the Canopean emissary, tries to teach. Just as Agents' broad satire ridicules the pompous oratory and endless machinations which occupy the Volyens, so does Lessing's view of Sufism attempt to pierce the delusions which keep man in thrall to his world. Lessing suggests that if humanity is ever to escape the futile beliefs that limit its spiritual and societal evolution, man must look beyond himself to the insights which Sufism offers to a world sorely in need.

CHAPTER ONE

Shikasta

The first book in Doris Lessing's Canopus in Argos quintet of novels is Shikasta, a complex, intimidating volume that introduces themes which run through the entire series. In Shikasta, Lessing undertakes the creation of a well-populated universe called Argos, as viewed by Canopus, the dominant empire in its system. One of Canopus' most difficult tasks lies in the overseeing of a dynamic but unstable planet, Rohanda (Persian for "fruitful"), as it begins its promising development into an earthly paradise, then gradually spins out of control to become Shikasta ("the broken one").

Shikasta is a devastating vision of earth. Lessing uses the format of space fiction to create an unrelentingly bleak but inventive picture of earth's history and perpetual failure, as viewed from the alien perspective of its dismayed creator. Using Canopus' involvement in Shikasta's history, Lessing develops explanations for many of the world's enduring mysteries, from Stonehenge to Atlantis, from the generation gap to U.F.O.s. Shikasta is a pessimistic but creative description of a planet's slide toward doom.

Interspersed with this picture, however, Lessing includes glimpses of a more enlightened world, the guardian planet called Canopus. Its aeons-long attempt to save Shikasta from the planet's self-destructive impulses becomes a parable of Sufist potential, an opportunity for Lessing to examine the

possibilities for spiritual and societal evolution that Sufism offers. By contrasting Canopus' view of eternal hope with Shikasta's unremitting waste of potential, Lessing develops a story that is both very pointed science fiction, and one that offers insight into the mystical philosophy of Sufism.

In Shikasta, Lessing highlights many basic tenets of Sufi philosophy, and only through an understanding of her philosophic viewpoint will the book develop a coherent pattern. Read superficially, it appears as an overly ambitious, poorly arranged novel in the science fiction tradition. When emphasis is placed on its Sufistic basis, however, nearly all of its major theses fit into a carefully pre-arranged pattern--a guide to potential seekers after Sufi wisdom--in the form of narratives to and from the planet Earth. ¹

Shikasta is a history book, a manual for Canopean students seeking to understand this unpredictable planet. It uses a multiplicity of perspectives to analyze earth from many viewpoints: the archivists' dispassionate, telescopic judgements; the narratives of emissaries working within Shikasta's influences; the human perspective of Shikastans

¹. Due to the recent publication of Canopus in Argos, few critical evaluations of the series' books are available. However, several critics have provided in-depth reviews of some of the books. Shikasta's reception is fairly typical of the attention which the entire series has received. Ursula LeGuin's review discusses the novel's "unshapeliness" and aesthetic incoherence, and Shikasta's narrow "Calvinist" message which nearly overpowers the majesty of Lessing's prose (12+). Anthony Burgess is also disappointed with Shikasta, primarily for its handling of human crises in the science-fiction genre,

struggling, successfully and unsuccessfully, to understand their situation; and a microscopic study of humanity as classifiable types, both anonymous and predictable in their actions. By using this multiplicity of views, Lessing is able to create a composite picture of earth to provide a (supposedly) objective study of a world's failure, and to emphasize key points of Sufi thought through its overlapping images. The total view is one of defeat, an admission of mankind's culpability. Yet the purpose of this book is not to condemn earth, but to educate new emissaries. Canopus refuses to despair, and will continue its vital work on Shikasta. The emissaries' messages of hope become echoes of Sufism's belief in man's eventual salvation, a goal attainable by any individual who refuses to succumb to the world around him.

The dominant narrative form in Shikasta is the archival record, "a compilation of documents selected to offer a very general picture of Shikasta for the use of first-year students

which, he suggests, trivializes the agonies of human life. For Burgess, Shikasta's redemption comes through the rage and personal vignettes of suffering humanity that Lessing includes ("Creeping towards Salvation" 10-11). Other articles investigate themes in Shikasta in greater depth. Thomas White discusses Lessing's rejection of political solutions as a hindrance to achieving utopia ("Opposing Necessity and Truth" 134-47), and Kathe Finney analyzes Lessing's rejection of "future nostalgia," utopias based on falsely emotional memories ("The Days of Future Past" 31-40). Betsy Drane studies Shikasta as part of the entire series, with its attempt to "re-mythologize" human history. She evaluates the effectiveness of the book's "pluralism of styles and codes" (144) in its attempt to blend seemingly incompatible types of narrative ("Shikasta" 143-61). Mona Knapp predominantly interprets Shikasta's plot in terms of earth history, but concludes with a condemnation of Canopus' colonialist, totalitarian denial of man's free will as a betrayal of Lessing's past views ("Shikasta" 133-39).

of Canopean Colonial Rule" (2). Their essence is emotional detachment, an impartial judging of events by their results, rather than by intentions. The archival records--printed in boldface to separate them from the more personal records of emissaries and humans--remain coldly objective at all times. Their baldly analytical studies of social development note human actions without allowing any of the rationalizations that a less objective viewpoint might interject. The detachment is deliberate. One of Sufism's primary tenets for understanding the Truth is objectivity, the necessity of ridding oneself of all cultural and emotional biases. It is imperative that a student analyze earth's history in terms of events rather than intentions, and strip away all the "rigid accretions" that have developed, to reveal the "knowing essence" that will allow comprehension of humanity's real position (Lessing "An Ancient Way" 81).

These accretions come predominantly from the political, religious and cultural biases which are imposed on all citizens. It is necessary for a seeker after philosophical truth to become aware of the blinders that these pre-conceptions impose. The archivists' notes in Shikasta's history sections do this bluntly. Their titles provide the first clue: "The Age of Ideology, 'Self-Portraits of Nations'. . . And Volume 3010, Psychology of the Masses, 'Self-Protective Mechanisms'" (133); or "Volume 3014, Period between World Wars II and III. Armies: Various Types of: The Armies of the Young" (231). These references to other volumes,

when interspersed with a potentially emotional subject, induce a sudden re-imposition of the detached viewpoint which Lessing is trying to maintain in her readers. Only by continuously preserving a rigorously objective view can a Sufi penetrate the illusions created by self-rationalizing organizations which rule the earth as it exists today. As a result, this first step in comprehending Sufist thought shapes the basic framework of Shikasta. A potentially objective picture has been established, from a cosmic viewpoint, since this is a philosophy which does not limit itself to the earth in its considerations but includes both the physical and the intangible universes.

Once this narrative platform for regarding the galaxy has been established, Lessing proceeds inward to a second focal point, that of the benevolent, Sufist-inspired emissaries who work within Shikasta's environment. Their narratives provide a middle ground in maintaining objectivity. While they are alien, with detached perspectives, the emissaries' sojourns on earth affect them in ways that threaten their objectivity. Views become both objective and emotional as the pressures of Shikasta overtake them. Indeed, one method of judging an emissary's perspective on Shikasta is to see the amount of emotion that he reveals in his records.

The main spokesman is Johor, an advanced member of the Canopean Civil Service, who attempts to control, or at least mitigate, some of Shikasta's worst excesses as the planet slides toward its destruction. Johor's historical overviews provide Lessing with freedom to reinterpret earth's evolution in an

imaginatively creative form, choosing events from all spheres of knowledge. Her theories incorporate not only known scientific attitudes on archeology and social anthropology, but also myths from nearly every known society's dawn. Within this imaginative reshaping of earth's history she also imbeds a more personal viewpoint, a Sufi master's perceptions of this world, and his methods of inspiring followers.

Johor becomes Shikasta's chief protagonist as a symbol of Sufi potential, an individual who is "in the world, but not of it," to quote Lessing in her essay by the same name (Small Personal Voice 129-137). He is the metaphoric example of a Sufi teacher, one who has freed himself from the "Shikastan pull and drag" (7), yet is willing to return as a Teacher available to anyone who will listen.

In Lessing's fictional Shikasta, Johor and his colleagues--all part of the same shared consciousness--have lived innumerable lives in Shikasta, using whatever method that is most effective for teaching the people of a specific time and culture. The archivists note that during one phase of Shikastan history, Johor's and Taufig's missions become identified as the "Period of the Public Cautioners" (108) from the beginning of Shikasta's recorded history until approximately 1500 years before the planet's destruction. As they try to impart their insights,

he, or she, would become notable for a certain level of perception and understanding demonstrated in conduct which was nearly always at odds with the local ideas and practices. Those individuals who were drawn to our envoy . . . formed a core or nucleus which could be used to strengthen and maintain the link bond. (110)

Such followers become the organizers of Shikasta's major religions, which unfortunately always distort the envoys' words into rituals. With the best of intentions, religious followers implement rules and rigid frameworks over this core of Truth, thus smothering its essence in formalism. As time and men's viewpoints change, this organization cannot change with them, and what was once a source of understanding becomes a prison of dogma. Idries Shah, one of the leading Sufi teachers in the West, has summarized:

The danger here, of course, is that the common human desire to seek a recognizable 'system'--a limiting framework through which to work, an ideology which will apparently answer all questions--may tempt numbers of otherwise flexible, far-sighted, and useful individuals to narrow their perspectives to one or more of the formulations offered. (Shah "Elephant" 43)

Consequently, Sufis refuse to dogmatize any of their teachings beyond general statements for the uninitiated, insisting on ever-changing methods of instruction and continually evolving interpretations of Sufism's basic message. Disciples are individually selected, and taught in the style which is most pertinent to a student's own cultural setting but which goes beyond that culture's accepted mind-set. Indeed, Sufi Masters warn that if any Sufist teacher institutionalizes his plan of study, he automatically reveals himself as a false teacher. Any unchanging course of spiritual study can only preserve the shell, not the essence of Truth.

However, despite their condemnation of formalized beliefs, Sufists emphasize the positive aspects that do exist within many of the world's religions and philosophies. As Johor

explains, nearly all religions, as well as political and social organizations, have been formed out of an understanding, partial though it may be, of the eternal Truth. The essence of S.O.W.F.--Substance-of-We-Feeling, as Johor so simplistically describes it to his first disciples--can be found in every religion which preaches love, tolerancē, and self-control in relations with man and nature. This is for encouragement of the universal soul which is the essence of Canopean and Sufi wisdom. The Lock, that empathic connection with Canopean energy, is maintained on Shikasta through the encouragement of S.O.W.F. This bears a relation to the suffusing energy that Sufists describe as baraka, the spiritual "Special Love," which refines man's understanding of existence (Shah Sufis 316). Less pure forms of baraka's love may also be found at the heart of all organizations which attempt to promote group welfare and a generation of positive actions and beliefs.

Lessing's Sufist thoughts are revealed most clearly in Johor's narratives, as the emissary tries to teach a handful of Shikastans about baraka, before asking them to spread his message among their neighbors: "To outwit their enemies, Shikastans must love each other, help each other, always be equals with each other, and never take each other's goods or substance" (74). This unfortunately becomes the basis of a "thou shalt not" creed organized by a nomadic tribe which spreads it throughout the middle Eastern world, becoming in time merely another narrow religious cult.

The emissaries' narratives provide an example for the ways

that individuals can live in this world yet supersede its restrictions through the use of their higher senses, providing examples for the less evolved members of society. Although in Shikasta they are presented as non-earthly leaders who appear in human guise in order to enlighten humanity, Sufis themselves regard such agents in a less magical light, "for instance explaining angels as representatives of man's higher facilities" (Graves viii). The emissaries are emblems of success stories on earth--leaders in a dangerous world--living in their society, yet in control of their destinies. It is the fact of their empathy with mankind that becomes the unifying point in Shikasta. Angels or not, the emissaries' mission is to show humanity that every man has the power to be a savior. Help may come from without, such as from teachers who provide direction, but the potential for enlightenment is available to every man, and comes from within each individual.

To enlarge on this perspective, Lessing proceeds inward from Canopus' histories to the more introspective journals, case studies and missives that are recorded by the various actors themselves. It is here that Lessing's talent for character analysis merges with her Sufist leanings most strongly. Within the multiple viewpoints presented in the diaries, Lessing provides a view of Sufist evolutionary potential, utilizing both successful and unsuccessful perspectives.

The transition from external viewpoint to internal perspective is accomplished in stages. Following his history of Shikasta and the combined emissaries' reports, Johor offers

two initial sets of case studies. Both of them deal with Shikastans, not as individuals, but as subjects for discussion. The analyses become disturbing accounts of cause and effect within the lives of various "types" of characters. Drane likens the reports to a "sociologist's case histories." By labeling them numerically (Individual Four [Terrorist Type 3] or Individual Six [Terrorist Type 8]), Lessing enables the reader to dispassionately observe what are classifiable, yet recognizably individual life stories, such as that of Patty Hearst, the Baader-Meinhof gang, and even Lessing herself (Drane 151). These become examples of Canopean failures in which people intended for a specific future turn to different paths, because of a lack of S.O.W.F. or the failure of a teacher to appear at a crucial time in their lives. Johor contrasts them with other individuals whom guides have reached in time for them to overcome--or at least cope with--their environment. This help may take the form of either excessive deprivation of some necessity--food, health, money--or excesses of the same, events intended to force an individual into analysis of his purpose in the world. Seemingly cold-hearted in his manipulation of these subjects, Johor arranges the experiences of his subjects' lives in the same way that Sufi masters arrange events in order to teach their students. This becomes another theme of Sufi thought which is re-emphasized throughout the personal journals. Lessing explains its importance in her essay "An Ancient Way to New Freedom," where she concludes:

Sometimes, when we look back over our lives, we may think: "I have learned more through that experience

than in all the rest of my life put together." The experience may have been a tough job of work, a phase of marriage, a serious love, an illness, a nervous breakdown. This way of learning, a time of cramped, thoughtful living, is perhaps nearer to the learning of the Sufi Way than any other. (81)

This becomes a keynote throughout the rest of Shikasta's journals. Since Sufi Truth cannot be taught, but only experienced, the individuals who seek to grow must nourish their own insight independently of organizations. This requires development of inner strength and a certainty of belief which is freed from cultural or other biases. It is a difficult path, but there are several methods by which it may be accomplished.

The method most familiar to readers of other Lessing stories is through madness. The report following Johor's case studies is the diary of Lynda Coldridge, Report #17. Lynda is not a new character in Lessing's fiction, having previously figured in The Four Gated City as a mental patient whose insights provide a catalyst for Martha Quest's own salvation:

through Lynda's fractured consciousness, Doris Lessing explores the fragmented consciousness of contemporary life, in which madness is one form--perhaps even the only sane one in some cases--of retreat from a world more insane than the individual. (Rubenstein 188)

In Shikasta, Lynda composes a diary of her thoughts in the asylum, at her emissary doctor's request. Her journal restates the Sufist concept that some types of madness are merely a sign of higher evolution--either physical or spiritual--that society cannot comprehend and thus punishes. Her ability to understand telepathy and a Canopean concept of evolution beyond the body causes her banishment to institutions whenever she utters her

vision of the soul: "we are several people fitted inside each other. Chinese boxes. Our bodies are [merely] the outside box" (184).

Lynda's diary, which becomes another archival record for Canopus, traces the path of her return to spiritual health. As she writes, she becomes more certain of the truth of her perceptions. Rejecting the acceptable social values, she becomes one of the most effective individuals in Shikasta's last days as she gathers other kindred souls around her, preserving the feeble but determined connection with Canopus' strength through these few members of humanity.

Lynda's recovery finally occurs partially because of the encouragement by her doctor, Dr. Herbert, an envoy who is in the proper place when she needs help. His example and her success are reflected negatively in the next major journal that Lessing's thorough archivists include in this manual. Rachel Sherban, despite the daily example set by her parents and brother George (Johor in emissary form), succumbs to despair at the conditions around her and becomes a self-styled martyr, refusing to live and help in the latter days of Shikasta's decline. This is a denial of a basic Canopean (and Sufi) step in advancement. In order for a Shikastan to evolve and free himself from "the pull and drag" of this world, he must prove himself strong enough to live in the world and not succumb to its temptations--one of which is despair. As previously demonstrated by the case studies, there is a need for each individual to fulfill his role in the world--appreciating its

beauties and making his own contribution to its progress. As a rule of Sufist belief, it is strongly emphasized by Idries Shah, who states that "the service of man is the service of God, discharging our duty to man is fulfilling God's commands and hence is surrendering to what He has commanded us to do" (Shah "Elephant" 23). In her journal, Rachael relates the advantages of her education, but even after having George as an example and a teacher, she rejects his request for help. In her journal, Rachael recollects one such conversation with George:

I said, how many people in the world have been brought up as we have been?

He nodded. . . All the time, more and more Camps. . .

I went on talking like this. Then I said, But all the time, a few brands plucked from the burning. Well I don't think I am up to it. (275-76)

In rejecting the tasks asked of her, she fails to help in the place where she is most needed, and after her self-imposed martyrdom she is forced to reincarnate yet another time into the world, rather than finally escaping its clutches and evolving to a more pleasant, higher level of existence.

Rachel's failure is all the more tragic because she has had the advantages of being educated in the Truth. Her inability to concentrate on the teachings she is daily exposed to becomes a reflection of the whole sad Shikastan population. In the latter days just before World War III, the world has become so corrupted by "the degenerative disease" (38) that it is almost impossible for anyone to think of anything but his own interests. The degenerative disease--the identification of

oneself as an individual at the expense of the group--has caused a paralysis of will in nearly everyone who is capable of positive action. This allows the forces of Shammat, the essence of darkness which is feeding on Shikasta's misery, to complete its takeover of the planet.

The concept of Shammat, the criminal planet which thrives on misery and corruption as Lessing's embodiment of evil, constitutes a portion of Sufi theology also. Depending on whether the teacher regards Sufism as a philosophy or a religion, descriptions of Shammat-like behavior vary, but still remain noticeably similar in Sufist writings. In the more traditional Islamic view of Sufism,

the soul of men is the theater of a struggle between two antagonistic tendencies. The God-centered orientation of his heart is continuously challenged and opposed by the self-centered inclination of his lower self, the locus of his egoistic tendencies. (Bowering 145-147)

In philosophic terms, Shammat is the animal nature which prevents man from attaining his potential. It is not associated with any one person or group, but represents the tendency toward intolerance and rampant selfishness, sophistry and pedantry that denies the Truth (Shah Sufis 361). Lessing incorporates these ideas into a picture of an actual evil empire for dramatic effect, but the tendencies which it personifies are those most inimical to the Sufi way.

Rachael's journal is also significant for its description of the education of a Sufi Master. Although not understanding all that she hears, Rachael does record the major steps which direct George Sheban's education in the Way. His continually

changing tutors, the various places that he lives, the people that he meets rather than attending school--all of these add up to an education free from the cultural or other biases that overwhelm his siblings. His acceptance of the trappings of humanity, like the urges of sex and pull toward self-aggrandizement, display the idealized method of life that is "in the world, but not of it." By accepting the temptations but neither embracing or denying their powers, he keeps himself free from obsession with their lures. Some critics have suggested that this reflects Lessing's view of Idries Shah, her Sufi mentor. Many of the events in Sherban's life parallel that of Shah (Williams 104-106), but they also parallel the lessons which any well-educated student in the Sufi discipline must learn.

Sherban's education is another opportunity for Lessing to emphasize the important factors in a Sufi student's development, and to demonstrate the difficulty for Shikastans (and uninitiated humans) to understand concepts which are simple for the enlightened student. It re-emphasizes the Sufi belief that knowledge is continually within our grasp, but it must be understood at each individual's level of development. Rachel cannot grasp the Truth in the same way as George is learning it, but through her diary, she begins learning basic concepts of Canopean wisdom in the most comprehensible manner for her. As Lynda finds also, the process of writing becomes the first step in self-education for Rachel, as she is forced to consciously analyze her beliefs.

Because of this singular education, George is able to assume his position as leader in the role that his times require. While previous situations had called for prophets, angels or other religious leaders, in this time of secular anarchy, it seems only appropriate that Lessing presents earth's last savior as the leader of an international youth gang. Leaders must be at the place where they will have most effect, and George's talents place him in the one spot where he can demonstrate a code of tolerance, preventing more violence from being unleashed on the world. By manipulating the Trials of the White Races with his co-emissaries' help, he is able to force the youth armies to recognize the shared guilt that all races bear. By defusing the "allowance of anger and desire for revenge" that had built up in its new conquerers (340), George is able to avert the long-planned massacre of European populations that has seemed inevitable until this point.

While the Trial seems overly stage-managed by Lessing, it does serve to demonstrate the ideal goal that Lessing believes a Sufi may reach, in his role of influencing this world's events. The power of good (Canopus), while not invincible, is a potent force, which must be exercised in order to encourage the positive factors that this world so desperately needs. The emissary, like a Sufi student, is part of this world. Overcoming the earth's inertia in order to ascend to higher levels of understanding requires unflagging effort by a student, wherever he finds himself.

Only by improving oneself within the requirements of this

lower world can a Sufi hopeful escape to the higher levels of understanding and harmony, the shadow heaven that Lessing's Canopus promises. The beauty of this other world is not drawn in sharp detail, but in the pre- and post-lapsarian worlds of Shikasta, hints are given of a physical Sufist heaven. Its worldly ideal, which envisions one concept of perfection, consists of harmony within this physical plane, a step toward evolution into more spiritual realms. The description of the early Shikastan settlements incorporates many of the Sufi ideals for a utopia. It is a world in harmony with the eternal plan. The inhabitants understand the purposes of their lives, ordered and regulated in tune with the cosmic forces of harmony (288). It is a very controlled existence, but is viewed as a "voluntary submission to the great Whole . . . not serfdom or slavery" (26). The cities are built out of naturally found materials, in geometric patterns which reinforce the positive harmonic currents that they amplify. These details, as well as others barely mentioned, like art, music and mathematics, all contribute toward the development of a "group mind," a racial consciousness that unites the community in "the strong quiet purpose which I have always found to be evidence, anywhere . . . of the necessity, the ebbs and flows and oscillations of the Lock" (33).

In these descriptions of Canopus' ideal society, Lessing reflects many of the concepts of Sufism's barely defined heaven or state of grace, achievable through evolution toward the source of all understanding. As Robert Graves emphasizes, it

is not for Sufis a loss of oneself in a total union with God, but a constant bath of harmony within the world, heaven on an earth that is in harmony with nature and with the cosmos (xvi). Its creed is one of love (baraka), an ecstasy or intoxication with Truth that reflects itself in love poetry and art of all kinds, both spiritual, physical, and mystical (Shah Sufis 364).

The utopia which Lessing describes in Shikasta is a physical utopia, merely one stage in the multi-faceted process of evolution that Sufi enlightenment espouses. It does not involve stasis at any one level, but rather a continual movement up to the level of communion, then a return to the world in order to lead others, or to develop other qualities of perception. "The Sufi, having penetrated [love's] secrets to the tasting of the true reality which lies behind, returns to the world in order to convey something of the steps of the Path" (Shah Sufis 366).

As Marriages, Lessing's next book in the series, elaborates, this physical utopia is only one of several paths which the evolving consciousness may take. After undergoing the test that life on Shikasta presents, the planet's inhabitants die and thus return to Zone Six, a gathering place for Shikastan souls between lives. It is a place for reflection, where Shikastans are forced to evaluate the worth of their past actions and judge whether they may reincarnate, remain in Zone Six as a lost soul, or move up to other, better worlds. Although the concept of zones is further developed in succeeding books, Shikasta provides eloquent details of this

purgatorial afterlife. Described by Johor as a desert of despair that weighs down all of its inhabitants with the snares of Shikasta's degeneration, it is also a place of opportunity. He lists three paths of action which are available to Shikastans between their lives, which may determine their eventual fates. Some lost souls never have enough courage to either pull free or return to the living Shikasta, and, almost unable to realize that they are dead, hover around the fringes of earth. Voyeuristically observing the events of Shikasta as if from behind a glass screen, they become the ghosts, vampires and assorted lost souls who--like the giants that preceded them--will eventually just fade away from sight and from memory: "You may yearn and learn and pine here for long ages and never know anything but frustration and emptiness and longing" (207). Their souls, their very essences will be gone like "a reflection on water" and they will be forever lost, never a part of the eternal Unity.

The second way of leaving Zone Six is to return to Shikasta by rebirth, in order "to enter Shikasta and win its prize, which [is], by enduring it, to be free of it forever" (9). When that has been accomplished, a third avenue presents itself for the determined individual, that of escape to another zone. Some Shikastans have done that successfully, and entered "Zones One to Five . . . their inhabitants [being] those who have worked their way out of and well past the Shikastan drag and pull, and are out of the reach of the miasmas of Zone Six" (7). Johor recollects that some of the Canopeon emissaries began their

existences on Shikasta, so evolution is possible even from that hellish place.

While expressed in physical terms, Lessing's Shikasta envisions paths of escape that Sufis believe may be achieved to a multiplicity of other levels. As with any teaching story, the picture created has potential for innumerable interpretations. The Sufis believe in the perfectability of earth through its inhabitants' evolution and return, creating a physical paradise on earth. But they also believe in other, more mystical evolutions, and the concept of Canopus in Lessing's fiction is limited only by the reader's imagination. Other interpretations of Canopus may correspond to a Buddhist concept of Nirvana, in which the fulfilled seeker becomes pure mind, part of the Whole of eternity, or the ideal of a disembodied heaven where friends await in an eternity of communion. The vision of Sufi Unity may reflect whatever cultural interpretation a reader chooses.

By creating physical representations of spiritual events in Shikasta, Lessing offers a Sufi parable of hope for a dying planet. Using the overlapping views of both Canopus and Shikasta, the author creates a composite picture of the earth, both tragic and hopeful in its potential and its waste. In the various journals and descriptions of humans as they stumble through life, Shikasta becomes an indictment of the destructive path than man has invariably chosen throughout history, and of the desperate battles by a few individuals for hope in an insane world. In contrast, the emissaries' narratives create a

picture of the potentially richer existence that man could live, if he is willing to attempt the spiritual path which Sufism offers. Even in the failed utopia that Shikasta has become, man still must work toward paradise.

CHAPTER TWO

The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five

and

The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight

Doris Lessing introduces the Argos galaxy and its chief empire in Shikasta through use of the vastly different perspectives offered by Shikasta's inhabitants and Canopus' emissaries. By incorporating both viewpoints into the first book, she is able to concurrently present both the planners' and their subjects' positions in this mythical Canopean empire.

Succeeding books in the series elaborate upon the themes introduced in Shikasta while continuing this pattern of alternating perspectives. The novels shift between the emissaries' discussions of unfinished missions and a few societies' tales of success. As the series unfolds, the second and fourth books (Marriages and Planet Eight) develop into cultural memoirs, narrated by the bards of their planets. These histories are success stories, pictures of societies and individuals in harmony with their benefactors. The recitations take the form of lyric folk tales that recall a culture's travail and triumph as it matures in response to different crises. The two stories contrast with the series' third and fifth books (Sirian Experiments and Sentimental Agents), which revert to the objective archival form that Canopus uses to record its (temporary) failures. Moving between dispassionate analysis and personal memoirs, the five

Canopus in Argos books illuminate Lessing's Sufist perspective in a variety of ways. Each grouping provides a different focus on Sufist thought, and together they all offer an insight into the philosophy's mystical beliefs.

Marriages and Planet Eight display many similar features as they pursue the series' goal of revealed Sufist thought. Partly because of the content of their plots, these two narratives stand apart from the other Canopus in Argos books. Unlike Shikasta's tale of failed potential, these two books are Canopean success stories. They relate the trials of two very different planets which, though in unity with Canopean thought, are destined for further evolution in understanding. Both at the beginning as well as at the end of their tales, the books exemplify Sufi ideals of evolution at different stages, and their travails provide hints toward the numerous paths which are available to a seeker after truth. Descriptions of their lifestyles, their methods of communication, their patterns of learning, and their submission to a higher consciousness parallel one another in these companion books, at the same time echoing Sufi tenets first introduced in Shikasta. They are utopian stories, dealing with the steps that may lead toward illumination while providing glimpses of stages already achieved by some students. Although the two books approach the topic in different ways, their intent and their methods serve to reinforce the ideas which Lessing is trying to illustrate through the series.

The narrative style used to accomplish this is also

similar in both books. They are self-acknowledged folk tales, related by a chronicler who is the spokesman for his group's collective memory. The events in Marriages are told by Lusik, one of "the Chroniclers and song-makers of our zone" (3). Charged with preserving Zone Three's history, he recites the ritual songs that echo through Marriages' medieval fairy tale story, elaborating on and emphasizing an accurate interpretation of his history-song. Marriages consequently develops the ethereal quality of an ancient myth, carefully preserved in the mind of a group's bard, and transmitted telepathically to the members whenever a need arises.

Similarly, the fate of Planet Eight is recounted by its Doeg, the memory-keeper of a pastoral society, whose own evolution in understanding becomes the history of his whole people. Through their trauma, the people of Planet Eight all ultimately become one Representative, and the Doeg's memories reflect the memories of all his clan. The book itself is a memory recited in response to an unknown questioner's query of "how the Canopean Agents seemed to us in the days of The Ice. This tale is [his] answer" (121). Though told as if from one voice, it illuminates the history of an evolving organism through the understanding of its composite voice--the Doeg, Keeper of Memories.

A main point of emphasis in both of these tales is one that Canopus continually repeats--"Remember." Each group's chronicler is its de facto leader, because the group's cohesiveness of mind preserves the essence of its identity. In

his memories, the bard recreates events and provides enlightenment; by understanding the past, he explains their present and points his people toward their future. Thus, memory reflects the Sufi theme of growth through insight which is one of the main unifying elements in all of the Canopus in Argos books. In Marriages and Planet Eight, understanding through memory becomes the goal, as well as the catalyst for both groups in their continuing development.

In addition to their similarity of narrative method, in both books parallel themes and paths lead toward analogous destinations. The final goal for each society is a higher, more refined understanding of life and a consequent approach to Canopean unity of mind. The themes stressed throughout their stories include an emphasis on holistic ideals concerning man and nature, an understanding of the larger pattern described by Canopus as the Necessity, and a comprehension that can only come from within. The result is a gradual evolution toward a more refined emphasis on the mind as it assumes precedence over the body's pressures, and a feeling of rightness as the seeker's soul attains new heights of group communion and understanding. Although they follow different methods, the societies described in Marriages and Planet Eight incorporate all of these themes into their quests for survival and growth.

Despite the many similarities between Marriages' zones and Planet Eight in their evolutions, the paths which they are forced to follow in their struggles are radically different. The two books are studies in contrast, involving change brought

about through prosperous evolution, and metamorphosis caused by trauma. Whereas Marriages' people are shaken out of their complacent habits with little danger to their prosperity, Planet Eight's citizens are forced into evolution by the fact of their world's impending destruction. The books trace routes toward understanding from both positive and negative causes, each with its different dangers and insights. Just as there are many stages in the evolution of consciousness, so are there numerous ways in which the journey may be taken.

Lessing uses major life crises, both positive and negative, to illustrate this point. Marriages develops the metaphor of evolution as marriage and birth--the exhilarating, unsettling, and illuminating events that enlarge one's perception of life. Planet Eight uses the allegory of death. All of the classic responses which humans invoke in their approach to death are examined and developed as steps in the route toward a higher consciousness, ending in the organism's rebirth into a better form. Between the two analogies, Lessing hopes to suggest a few of the myriad routes that are available to a seeker. Illumination is restricted for the Sufi student only by the limitations of his mind. There are as many paths to Truth as there are people seeking to find it, and Lessing's books attempt to vivify a few of these many paths.

Marriages is undoubtedly the most light-hearted and opulent of the five Canopus in Argos books. It describes a multi-colored, multi-level world of Canopean success, in terms of battles between the sexes waged among three very

different countries. Its picture of isolated cultures being forced out of stagnation into a challenging mixture of ideas, passions and enlightenment is as pleasant as the previous description of Shikasta has been sobering. It is the romantic fairy tale of Canopus in Argos.¹

Marriages' plot describes the events which force Zones Three, Four and Five out of their age-old insularity into revitalizing acquaintanceships. Following the "Providers" order, Al*Ith, the queen of pastoral Zone Three, reluctantly marries Ben Ata, the king of militaristic Zone Four. The story focuses on the zones' growing understanding of each other's ways, emulating the turbulent course of their rulers' emerging love and companionship. Their union ends soon after the birth of their son, Arusi, when a new "Order" is issued by the Providers. Ben Ata must wed Vashti, the warrior queen of nomadic Zone Five, in order to unite those kingdoms through their daughter, and Al*Ith is required to return to her home. She eventually travels even farther, establishing contact for her people with the ethereal Zone Two. Through the rulers' marriages and children, age-old boundaries between their countries are broken down and progress is restored to the zones.

1. Marriages has received the greatest critical attention of the Canopus series. Rochelle Cleary investigates its name imagery, citing derivations and letter shifts within names which define characters in terms of their special characteristics or places in society ("What's in a Name?" 8-10). The different modes and significant ways of communicating used in Marriages is explored by Ellen Peel ("Communicating Differently" 11-13), and Lee Khanna writes about the connection between art and truth in Lessing's feminist utopian fable

Since each area represents an ascending level of social and philosophic development, the opening of boundaries provides a means for spiritual advancement by its inhabitants. Each zone becomes a new stage for the soul's "possibilities," a word frequently invoked by the rulers as they attempt to puzzle out the purpose of their marriages. The possibilities that they are offered correspond to Sufist stages in philosophical development; and each successive zone is another upward step in the path toward the mysterious harmony which the inhabitants recognize as the central factor directing their lives.

The zones, so vividly described in Marriages, offer themselves to a number of interpretations, each increasingly complex. They can be regarded as entertaining pictures, or as allegorical critiques of social and governmental systems that exist on earth today. The zones may also represent imaginative projections by Lessing of her views concerning the logical development of society from the physical to the ethereal, from the militaristic to the pacific, and from the fragmented to the integrated. The egalitarian zones two and three contain many similarities to the ideal societies that she posits as an

("Truth and Art in Women's Worlds" 121-33). Betsy Drane views Marriages as an allegory for the world's "communal progress toward Gnosis" (161), a spiritual fable told in medieval form ("Marriages" 161-68). In Mona Knapp's similar view, Marriages pursues the theme of expansion of perspective through the overcoming of limitations, but the total control which the Providers have over the zone dwellers' "serflike mentality" (163) becomes, for Knapp, a secondary issue of free will ("Marriages 155-63). Marsha Rowe defines Marriages in terms of its sexual politics and feminist overtones, and rejects its insights as stereotypical and badly done ("If You Mate" 191-205).

evolutionary waypoint in her later, utopian works (White 134). But the zones also correspond with seven specific Sufi stages of development that a Seeker must experience. These "degrees in the transmutation of the consciousness" (Shah Sufis 445) are levels that apply to the individual as well as to the group and to society in general, making even further development possible. Each of the zones, both those described and those unexplored in Marriages, illuminate qualities of these seven Sufist levels, in an inverted heirarchy.

The seven stages can be classified by the qualities which describe their levels of development:

1. The individual out of personal control believes himself to be a coherent personality, starts to learn that he, like all undeveloped individuals, has a multiple and changing personality.
2. The dawn of self-awareness and "accusation," in which automatic thoughts are seen for what they are.
3. The beginning of real mental integration, when the mind is becoming capable of operating on a higher level than was its previous futile custom.
4. Serene balance, equilibrium of the individuality.
5. Power of fulfillment, new ranges of experience not susceptible to description beyond approximate analogy.
6. A new activity and function, including extra dimensions of the individuality.
7. Completion of the task of reconstitution, possibility of teaching others, capacity for objective understanding. (Shah Sufis 446)

Lessing develops these levels into fictional kingdoms, each with its own cherished cosmology. In ascending zones, each society displays in its qualities an embodiment of one of the seven stages of knowledge that a Sufist seeker must pass through on his path to illumination. From the first stage, Shikasta's Zone Six, to the unseen Zone One with its evocation of Sufism's highest stages of development, Marriages' countries

become an allegory of Sufi development toward spiritual perfection.

As described by Lessing, each zone represents a facet of earthly life and society, invented societies that prosper within their own boundaries, but in which the seeds of destruction are developing. They are introduced in Shikasta's opening pages as concentric rings which surround that poor planet's surface, invisible to its inhabitants but existing on physical planes all their own. The invisible dimension results in a reader's perception of the zones' nature as being both allegorical and physical. While some critics have puzzled over the sudden shift from physical nature in Shikasta to the metaphoric character of the zones (Drane 156), Lessing emphasizes in her description of Zone Six in Shikasta that they are regions attainable by Shikastans only after death, as the realization of their multiple possibilities is reasserted between lives. Zone Six thus becomes the only debarkation point for any Shikasta's journey toward the light, the place where individuals change form and re-evaluate their earthly actions.

Zone Six is only mentioned in passing in Marriages, although it is elaborately described in Shikasta. To the inhabitants of other zones, it is an abhorrent place. "It is an evil race. They kill and torture each other all the time,[just] for the sake of it" (Marriages 97). Zone Six's only contribution to the other zones is in the art of destruction. Zone Six supposedly can "use the air itself to make weapons"

(97), and a visitor from that region gives Ben Ata the idea for his fake "invincibility vests" and "death ray fortresses" (96). Its people have no group ties or conception of responsibility to anything other than individual supremacy. Isolated within themselves, seeing peace solely in terms of force, Zone Six's citizens do not even constitute a society. Lacking self-control, they regard others in the same light, as untrustworthy opponents. Having faith only in their supposed intellect, Zone Six's people regard nature, rather than themselves, as being out of control.

However, Zone Six's inhabitants do have the potential for recognizing the futility of their beliefs. Occupying that purgatorial level in the interim periods between their Shikastan lives, these souls have opportunities to evaluate their actions, thus (hopefully) achieving at least a glimpse into higher forms of understanding. Still trapped in their individualistic, competitive delusions, Zone Six's souls do have potential, but little more at this stage.

Yet at Marriages' beginning, even potential is rare. Zone Six is the only place from which the stricken Shikastans may begin their escape from torment, and the almost inviolable boundaries between zones nearly eliminates even that hope until the Providers intervene. The necessity for Al*Ith to open the zones to freer movement thus takes on a sense of Sufist urgency. If the souls trapped in Shikasta's turmoil are ever to escape before the coming holocaust, paths must be provided for their exit. Leaders like Al*Ith, who risk ostracism, do so

for the good of all humanity; her actions will ultimately affect even the farthest reaches of society. Al*Ith's acquiescence to The Order becomes a vehicle for the good of all mankind, even for the benighted inhabitants of Zone Six and beyond.

The land which adjoins Zone Six, in Marriages' ascending order of development, is the desert kingdom of Zone Five, terrorized by nomads under the command of its warrior queen, Vashti. Roughly corresponding in geography and lifestyle to the historic Arabian States of the earth's mid-East, Zone Five has been settled by artisans, whom Vashti's armies continually plunder. Its society is clan oriented, illiterate, and responds only to brute strength or cunning. On the Canopean (and Sufist) evolutionary scale, it is nearly all potential and almost no development. Zone Five is entirely a physical world, with almost no mental or spiritual enlightenment. As exemplified by Vashti, it lives an existence ruled by sensual desires and only rudimentary thought. She eats, fights, and loves only for her self-gratification, and reminds her bemused husband, Ben Ata, of a hunting hawk (206), all self-confidence and instinct. Unlike residents of the more advanced zones, she has no knowledge of the Providers, and fulfills their Orders only because she thinks that they are her own ideas.

Her world is an evocation of life at a primitive, instinctual level, with any development being predominantly physical. This culture's very strengths also reveal its weaknesses. Relying on cunning and force for the acquisition of

wealth, too much unplanned success has begun to threaten the warriors' lean readiness. Vashti wants an alliance with Zone Four that will secure her borders while the warriors continue plundering their zone's cities. However, further riches will only reinforce Zone Five's ongoing cycle of triumph and vanquishment by different clans; nothing will change until they find a more stable form of life. The factor lacking in Zone Five is a level of thought beyond animal instinct. In Sufist hierarchy, this land represents a soul's emerging "self-awareness" and potential for self-control. Its queen must become conscious of her choices if her people are to have any chance of development.

That self-consciousness and stability, the next step for Vashti, exists in Zone Four as exemplified by its ruler. Ben Ata is the king of a militaristic society which keeps itself busy through continual war games and skirmishes. Although the armies never fight any actual wars, their continual preparations preserve the rigid class system that Ben Ata's country has codified, while avoiding the destruction that either a war or pillage of the country's towns would lead to. He has institutionalized warfare but rendered it almost harmless. Unfortunately, the cost of stability for Zone Four is poverty. All of its men are in the military, leaving craftsmanship, religion and farming predominantly in the hands of its subordinate women.

The women of Zone Four consequently have formed a sub-culture of their own, totally excluding men from the racial

memory which they preserve through forbidden songs and secret meetings. Oppressed by their masters, they have maintained the secrets of spiritual advancement for ages, although they have not had any way of enlarging on their dormant powers. The arrival of Al*Ith becomes a catalyst for their liberation and the consequent sharing of knowledge which may lead to higher states of understanding for all of Zone Four's people.

The dichotomy between the sexes in Zone Four is reflected in their countryside--a rainy, canal-crossed marshland that evokes images both geographically and socially similar to western Europe. The peaceful farms suffer because of its zone's military emphasis, just as the people's development lags due to the paucity of communication between sexes. As Al*Ith summarizes after one of her visits:

the nature of Zone Four--it was conflict and battle and warring. In everything. A tension and a fighting in its very substance: so that every feeling, every thought held in it its own opposite.
(114)

The result is strong emotions which affect the inhabitants' thoughts. Violent jealousies, tears and possessiveness only serve to further divide its people, and to drown out the Providers' Orders. Zone Four women are able to hear the commands, but for the zone's dominating men, a messenger always delivers the directives which they must follow. They are an intelligent people, but so absorbed in the rules with which they have saddled themselves that they fear the power of illuminating thought as much as they fear even the sight of Zone Three's peaks.

When Al*Ith becomes the bride of Ben Ata, her example of moderation and balance in all things finally forces him into a realization of higher potentialities for spiritual development. He represents, in this book's equation, a low level of humanity in Sufist terms, ignoring the intellectual knowledge available while emphasizing strict physical control. While Ben Ata and his countrymen are far more advanced than Zone Five's people, they are nonetheless still acting more out of instinct than from understanding. Like the third stage of Sufi development that he exemplifies, "the beginning of real mental integration," Ben Ata is only slowly developing his potential. Al*Ith brings him to a much greater awareness of his powers, at the same time as his country finally recognizes the insights available in the zone's own female population.

The source of this regeneration comes from a still more advanced realm, the mountainous Zone Three. Occupying land comparable to that of the Himalayan countries, it is an airy, windy, color-filled series of plateaus which supports its pastoral, egalitarian citizens in prosperity. The society is matriarchal, led by its mother-queen who embodies the group mind that unifies its people. The zone's main form of communication is through telepathy, both among humans and with animals.

Living in direct mental communication with the Providers' wishes, Zone Three emphasizes moderation and sharing above all. In Zone Three, a child has two gene-parents, but many mind-parents as well, assuring its development in group unity.

The zone's main code is aestheticism, which results in songs, pictures, buildings and clothes that deliberately encourage the harmony of mind and body which supports their society.

Emotions are discouraged as divisive, as is excessive sensuality because of its emphasis on individuality and the body instead of the mind. Consequently, Zone Three has become a virtual utopia for its inhabitants, serene, unified, and complacent. Having achieved a state of near perfection physically, it has become static. Contemptuous of warlike Zone Four, it is nevertheless unwilling to even look beyond its borders toward the mysterious potential of Zone Two.

The Providers end the stagnation of Zone Three with their command that Al*Ith descend to Zone Four. During her sojourn there, she agonizingly begins to understand her people's failure, while showing Ben Ata the enormous potentialities available to him. On her final return to Zone Three, having looked at her own zone's people once more, "Al*Ith saw in her mind's eye the pale unfed faces of the poor of Zone Four and . . . suddenly found those she was looking at fat and mindless" (191). Her new knowledge causes her initially to fade from the memories of her fellow-citizens, then to become an object of hostility, as if she is in Disharmony. Yet the shock that her changing state sends through Zone Three becomes the start of a cleansing wind of change. Eventually the borders of Zones Three, Four and Five open to admit fresh ideas from all directions, the changes that Sufis insist are necessary for a soul's migration toward the Light.

Al*Ith herself goes even further. Having seen Zones Three and Four, she risks banishment and loss of connection from her group's consciousness as she studies Zone Two. Like the disastrous visit that Zone Four's unprepared women attempt, Al*Ith's initial foray into Zone Two is unsuccessful; but in an imitation of Sufist tradition, she subsequently devotes her life to a slow absorption into its truths. She leaves behind the "serene balance and equilibrium" of the fourth Sufi stage of preparation for a new range of experience that she can feel but not describe.

Zone Two is a much more vague area than any of its neighbors. Its inhabitants never enter the book's purview, and their characters are sketched entirely through Al*Ith's eyes. It is a land where physical nature has been almost shed in favor of the spirit. With inhabitants that live a mountaintop existence, in the religious as well as the physical sense of that phrase, Zone Two may be best described as a land of flames. The mountain pass that opens from Zone Three is intensely blue, and Al*Ith perceives the citizens of Zone Two in the form of flickering blue flames of consciousness. Their contact with her comes only through her dreams, a state of telepathy beyond even the capacities of Zone Three. She feels their potential, but like the less refined Zone Four inhabitants, she has difficulty comprehending Zone Two's essence, though she knows that understanding is the point of her existence:

It is as if wind had become fire, or flames. . .
the blue is only the matrix of the real light . . .
and if I shut my eyes . . . I can see images,
pictures, reflections. . . they are not like us,

to them we are just . . . they pity us and help us,
but we are just . . . (230)

Al*Ith may touch the fringes of Zone Two perception, but its qualities are still as far beyond her comprehension as its traits are indescribable--the fifth stage of Sufi advancement toward the soul's potential.

What is beyond Zone Two? Following the general trend of Lessing's stages as they parallel Sufi levels of development, Zone One might perhaps be a training ground for Canopus' emissaries. It could conceivably be analogous to the stage at which a student achieves much of his higher potential and contemplates returning to lower levels as a Teacher. Nothing in Canopus in Argos hints at the qualities of Zone One, but the oblique characteristics which Canopus' emissaries display provide shadowy hints toward the apex of human philosophical illumination. The brief glimpses into Canopean wisdom offered in each of the five books may be the essence of Zone One, or of other, unnamed worlds in this universe. In Argos' galaxy, though, the qualities that compose Canopus and its colonies are only ascertainable beyond the lower zones in philosophical terms, reaffirming the viewpoint that connects this whole series.

The points which Marriages makes through its actors parallel many ideas first introduced in Shikasta, ideas also reflecting Sufi thought. Above all, the experience of learning new patterns of thought cannot be taught directly. When Al*Ith lectures Ben Ata about his deficiencies, he stops listening and she finds "that in this somewhat hectoring analysis, she

[feels] not an inkling of the rush of nearness to understanding she had felt" (1997). All of the zones can learn by example, but only frustration results from their occasional missionary attempts. Comprehension is attained only by observing and absorbing the necessary lessons, not by being tutored in proper methods.

What is more, the process of understanding is not limited to the elite or intellectual superiors of any group. Except for Al*Ith herself, the premier student in Marriages is Dabeeb, an ignored wife and unwilling mistress from Zone Four. She becomes a symbol of the determined student. Despite humiliations, she persists in her quest and like Al*Ith is one of the first to move beyond her original zone to a higher plateau. Sufi advancement is available to anyone with the determination to persevere and the willingness to learn.

A third point that Marriages' zones illustrate is the Sufist emphasis away from bodily preoccupation and social fragmentation toward a life of the spirit, lived in a holistic ideal of proportion. The zones' descriptions move from physical sensation to preeminence of the mind in the same measure as their stratified levels of society give way to egalitarian communities which emphasize the need for proportion in all aspects of their lives. After this is achieved, one's consciousness can go still further, preserving its individuality while evolving into new forms of existence, resulting in a being both single and plural, in tune with Canopean and Sufist Harmony.

While allegorizing these points, Lessing concurrently unifies them in all the zone descriptions through the themes of birth and marriage. Cutting across the fragmented zones' pictures, she introduces the metaphor of marriage as a social manifestation of evolution's exciting and disturbing aspects. The marriages in this book require the characters to redefine themselves in terms of their new partners' ideas. Even the concept of marriage must be redefined by its participants as it affects individual zones. Al*ith goes so far as to ask Ben Ata for a dictionary, in order to investigate his definition of love. The understanding that springs from a true marriage becomes a catalyst for change, as the Providers had anticipated. Used both as a motivating device for Lessing to examine each zone's perspective and as a means to begin action in the story, the marriage theme, with its emphasis on change and new viewpoints, becomes Marriages' chief plot device and the heart of its action. The ultimate marriage is that of man with God, which surpasses all other unions. Its power enriches the lives of everyone that it reaches.

The result of such a union is reflected in the book's correlary birth imagery. The birth of heirs provides the plot's synthesis, a physical manifestation of the spiritual changes that have taken place between zones. Like the Sufi stages of development that are embodied through symbolic death experiences, each level attained becomes a spiritual rebirth. The falling birth rates noted throughout each isolated zone at the tale's beginning are eventually matched by the fecundity

that intermingling of zones produces. Marriages' births are Lessing's evolutionary results--new hybrid forms which inherit the best of both worlds. Like the universality of marriage and birth as cycles in human life, the images of union and development of the soul with its ideal provides a familiar, and powerfully positive note in Marriages. Thus, the book emphasizes the inevitable development of the soul, if it is only given a chance to respond to the potential that life holds.

Planet Eight approaches the same themes as Marriages from a diametrically opposite view. In the world that Marriages describes, evolution is regarded as a long-term, pleasant path to self-fulfillment through the stimulating crises that life offers as guides to a person's development. However, Lessing recognizes that there is a darker side which balances such a leisurely evolution into the light.

Planet Eight examines that second path of change through the traumas that are also a factor in the universe--the long night of a soul's struggle toward understanding. Drawing on two different sources--her fascination with Scott's Antarctic expedition, and a friend's lingering death--Lessing creates a chilling picture of a society that is slowly freezing to death. The book's form utilizes the five psychological stages with which a patient contemplates his approaching death, in order to limn the final days of Planet Eight's return to the Ice Age. The Representative's tale of death becomes an allegory of man's potential for metamorphosis through mortal crisis into new

life, and a restatement, from yet another perspective, of the Sufi themes that unite Lessing's Canopus in Argos books.²

Planet Eight is a compact recitation of a society's lingering death as its planet slowly turns to ice. The story's narrative is a memoir told by its Representative, the group's Doeg (keeper of memories). Originally created by Canopus from four types of beings imported from different worlds, the people of Planet Eight have formed a primitive agrarian society, in accord with its Canopean mentors as it slowly develops. Then people are suddenly commanded to build a huge wall around half of their planet, a task which ends all progress and is completed just as snow, previously unknown, begins to fall. The planet has shifted off course and will eventually become entirely glaciated, but its people are told that before the process is complete they will have been removed to the new home which has always been their destiny. Until that can be accomplished, they must adapt to a changing world with help from Canopus. Doeg records the encroaching ice and its effect

2. The few reviewers who discuss Planet Eight hold diametrically opposed opinions about its worth. Mark Abley regards the book as a masterful "requiem for ourselves," an audacious attempt to confront humanity's potential death sentence ("Joy in the Face of Extinction" 57-58), although both Alice Turner and John Leonard dislike Planet Eight because of the mystical philosophy that undergirds it. While admitting that the book is a splendid "ecological thriller," Leonard finds its humans "less compelling than the weather" ("The Spacing Out" 14). Mona Knapp analyzes Planet Eight's plot in terms of Lessing's new mystical tradition but finds the book's conclusion "pointless" ("The Making" 144-48). Betsy Drane regards Planet Eight as a study in the problem of suffering in the world, finally concluding that the book is a dreary study in mystical intervention, an unsatisfactory answer to an eternal question ("The Making" 173-86).

on the heavy animals and disbelieving people's way of life as they retreat before the cold. The ice slowly swallows their planet's villages, its sacred ocean and finally even the restraining wall, while the people regress into criminality and violence. At Johor's next visit, they are devastated to learn that Rohanda, their intended home, has become Shikasta (the broken one), and the people cannot be rescued. With Johor at his side, still guiding and encouraging, Doeg watches helplessly as his people slide into fatal lethargy while the snows cover them. Finally, after seeing Planet Eight's last grass disappear, the remaining inhabitants begin a death walk toward the north pole, dying finally on a mountaintop--and then continuing their journey to their new home as they merge into a fresh form that is both individual and communal. They have become the Representative who is reliving their history.

Unlike the pleasant changes in Marriages, pain and incomprehension at the malign forces which also shape man's destiny are embodied in this story. It is a stern examination of the "underside of the philosophy of necessity" (Drane 174) which is so positively described in Marriages. Planet Eight traces the path of evolution by a route that leads through death into a new concept of life. In Sufist terms, it is an allegorical description of evolution in consciousness, attainable by spiritual as well as physical paths:

Man's psychological evolution is seen as a journey from an original state of unity, through a separation, to a yearning for oneness, and a return to unity through the "death" of the conditioned self and a spiritual rebirth.
(Lewin Review 357)

Lessing ties this allegorical interpretation to an analysis of suffering in the world and creates a physical picture of incomprehension and eventual triumph over pain. Using the snow that falls on Planet Eight to exemplify a familiar literary theme--existential crisis and approaching disaster (Knapp 144)--Lessing moves the planet's victims through the crises that trauma precipitates into a new world of potential for the soul.

The form of Planet Eight has its external origins in Lessing's long-time fascination with Robert F. Scott and his ill-fated expedition to the South Pole. In her "Afterword" to Planet Eight, she discusses at length the effect that his noble quest had on her generation. The wintery themes of Planet Eight dovetail with the death by ice that Scott suffered, and the Deog's anguished recollection imitates in many ways the journals that Scott and his four companions maintained until they died with pen in hand. The explorers' determination to leave records for posterity corresponds, on at least one level, with Canopus' imperative of "Remember," that dictum which asserts that progress is only possible through understanding of the past. Thus Johor's continual insistence on Doeg's and Alsi's recitations about their history becomes more than a pastime while they slowly perish, but rather an embodiment of hope for the future--a future that the people cannot yet comprehend. These events may even affect Canopus' own destiny. At one point, Johor tells Doeg that "Our Empire isn't random. . . . Our growth, our existence, what we are is a unit, a unity,

a whole" (57). The loss of Planet Eight's identity can only diminish the whole organism that is Canopus. The Doeg's records of suffering and salvation, like Scott's party's journals of discovery and death, may provide new keys for explorers into the unknown.

However, a second, less overtly discussed incident has even greater effect on Planet Eight's narrative. In the last few sentences of her "Afterword," Lessing comments on the book's origin in relation to another death, then suggests that her motives may have been different than even she had originally suspected:

Perhaps something else was going on. I finished writing [Planet Eight] the day after the death of someone I had known a long time, though it did not occur to me to make connection until then. It took her a long cold time to die, and she was hungry too, for she was refusing to eat and drink, so as to hurry things along. . . It seems to me that we do not know nearly enough about ourselves; that we do not often wonder if our lives, or some events and times in our lives, may not be analogues or metaphors or echoes of evolvments and happenings going on in other people.
(144-45)

In relation to this admission by Ms. Lessing, the outline of Planet Eight assumes a distinct, coherent form which supports the theme of evolution through crisis, while detailing the external changes that characterize such a crisis. Planet Eight becomes an almost clinical analysis of the psychological stages--denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance--which a patient experiences in his approach to death. The citizens of Planet Eight are an organism contemplating its mortality, and Planet Eight relates the phases that they pass through enroute to their acceptance of that fact, with the

support of their spiritual counsel, Johor. At the same time, the lessons that Doeg is absorbing during those trying days also reassert the Sufi lessons that Lessing is trying to present.

Yet even with the book's preoccupation with dying, its final conclusion is that physical death does not equate with the end of all things, thus superseding the pessimism of this study in thanatology. Her Sufi understanding allows Lessing to add one more scene to the end of her book, where a better form of existence is suggested. This last addition lifts Planet Eight from the realm of corporeal fiction into that of parable, thus connecting it even more firmly with the themes noted in Canopus in Argos's previous books. Tragedy, as well as prosperity, may lead to knowledge. It all depends on the individual.

The emotions that Planet Eight's inhabitants experience throughout their crisis bear many striking resemblances to the stages of death first publically chronicled by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her book On Death and Dying. In her discussion of the psychological states experienced by patients during their slow approach to death, Dr. Kubler-Ross suggests that in most cases, mankind's attitudes toward mortality display fairly uniform characteristics. The stages that she notes are denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. All of these stages are also encountered in Planet Eight.

The crisis begins like that of a major disease, with the doctor's diagnosis. When Johor first announces the need for a

wall and tells Doeg that ice is coming to cover their land, the people simply cannot believe it. Having been assured of their importance in the Canopean plan, the citizens cannot accept that their world has no future. They are one with their planet, and despite hopes for a new existence on Rohanda, their life as they conceive of it is doomed. The changes which Planet Eight must undergo will become manifestations of their self-image's slow death. Initially, this is too much for them to accept. As Kubler-Ross notes, "Since in our unconscious mind we are all immortal, it is almost inconceivable for us to acknowledge that we too have to face death" (37).

The inhabitants of Planet Eight cannot accept the sentence, and their first response is a numb denial. While making the changes in lifestyle that Canopus suggests, the people do not initially move beyond dumb compliance with the inevitable:

We--those of us entrusted with the task of moving the populations out of their threatened homes--were always at work, in our imaginations, on the task of really knowing that shortly ice and snow would rule here. And those who had to submit to the move were not taking it in either. (8)

The movement south only serves to deaden their understanding of what is actually occurring, even while the people watch the snow advance on them.

Denial eventually gives way to isolation as the inhabitants of Planet Eight begin to acknowledge their world's predicament. Having always seen themselves as lithe, colorful counterparts to their balmy planet, the people find themselves trapped in heavy coats, with their skin color changing from rich brown to a sickly yellow-grey. Being forced to share

cold, dirty dwellings, "crowding, massed, jostling together" (12), the people's self-conception begins to be destroyed. They have become alienated from each other, from the land, and even from their own former identities. Consequently, the structure of their society begins to break down as the people enter the second phase in their long dying. Hostility comes to the fore in the stage that Kubler-Ross describes as "feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment; the logical next question [being]: 'Why me?'" (44). Since Planet Eight's traditional cohesiveness has begun to lose its power, anger becomes manifested openly in violence and in questions against Canopus: "It had been, before The Ice, a rare thing to have a killing. Now we expected murder. We had not thieved from each other: now it was common" (21). Questions about the people's suffering are frequently voiced, amplified by the Doeg: "Where was Canopus? Why did they . . . make us wait and suffer and wonder?" (43).

The common understanding that has linked Planet Eight's people with their creators is temporarily destroyed by suffering, and their growing psychic pain fills the people not only with rage but also with a sense of what Doeg calls a puzzling "irrational guilt" about their situation. Robert Lifton, in his book The Broken Connection, explains such feelings by suggesting that "guilt is experienced as expression of, and responsibility for, the breakdown of the social balance." Especially in situations where an entire group has become the victim of implacable forces, those forces "strain at

our evolutionary mechanisms . . . so extremely that victims are overwhelmed by the social 'deviation' from ordinary standards of harmony" (145). The society of Planet Eight sees itself as culpable not only for their culture's disintegration, but also for their very predicament. Vacillation between guilt and its attendant, though obverse, anger completes the people's demoralization, leaving them in a state of torpor while they wait for Canopus' return.

Then Johor does return, only to dash their last hopes of rescue. Hearing his message that Rohanda has become uninhabitable and that no removal is possible from Planet Eight, Doeg's rage flairs again, interspersed with attempts at negotiation:

"But you are not able to space-lift off this planet its doomed millions? You do not have a little unwanted planet somewhere that we could be given to use and develop and make fruitful? You have no use for us?" (56)

Such demands are illustrative of the desperation that Kubler-Ross' third Stage--bargaining--reflects. Unlike most of humanity, Planet Eight's Doeg is able to confront his creator directly, but the scope of this stage's demands is similar to that seen in many incurable patients. Although acknowledging that bargaining is usually of brief duration and is more prevalent among religiously minded patients, Kubler-Ross still emphasizes its importance as a delaying action:

If we have been unable to face the sad facts in the first period and have been angry at people and God in the second phase, maybe we can succeed in entering into some sort of agreement which may postpone the inevitable. (72)

In Planet Eight, Doeg's attempts at bargaining receive equally short shrift from Johor. While admitting the injustice of Planet Eight's sentence, the emissary re-emphasizes his inability to change the course of events, until Doeg understands for himself that one cannot bargain with the inevitable. Having realized that, he advances closer to acceptance of his planet's inevitable fate, while Johor tries to teach Doeg to see beyond the fact of physical death.

From this time on, Doeg comes closer to comprehension of his importance as the telepathic memory of his people. Under Johor's tutelage, he begins to analyze the meaning of reality, recalling the molecular views of nature that he has seen, and reinterpreting that knowledge in terms of his people's existence.

However, the group's telepathy flows both ways and Doeg is frequently overcome by the despair which claims so many of his people, an aspect of dying's fourth stage. Johor continually urges the people to "stay alive for as long as you can. Say it is necessary," but the majority of the planet's people "have decided not to eat, but to let themselves die'" (63-64). Johor's response is that there is more than one way to die, with the implication that the people are choosing death of the soul as well as of the body. Their despair contrasts with that of Doeg and the other representatives, who, while mourning the passing of their former selves, have moved through the depression which is a form of preparation, into a "sober, quiet, responsible feeling . . . that did not admit grief, or

mourning, or despair" (76).

Both Kubler-Ross and Lifton distinguish between these two forms of depression. The destructive side--despair--is a simple giving up of life through a "psychic numbing," in which "there is no sense of integrity, no symbolized immortality, no possibility for self-completion" (Lifton 108). The second, less destructive version--depression--involves a gradual emotional withdrawal, "in order to facilitate the state of acceptance" (Kubler-Ross 77). Doeg and his fellow representatives, with Johor's help, utilize the second type, and immediately move on to the final stage, the acceptance of death as a personal fact:

If a patient has had enough time . . . and has been given some help in working through the previously described stages, he will reach a stage during which he is neither depressed nor angry about his "fate." He will have been able to express his previous feelings, his envy for the living and healthy, his anger at those who do not have to face their end so soon. He will have mourned the impending loss of so many meaningful people and places and he will contemplate his coming end with a certain degree of quiet expectation. (Kubler-Ross 99)

Having tried to rouse the people, to understand the purpose of his role as memory-keeper, and to preserve some semblance of the dying culture, Doeg and his fellow representatives gather one last time at the South Pole to watch their planet's soil be covered forever. Then, taking their cue from the animals which have fed them, the representatives--all that is left of Planet Eight's people--begin their forced march north into the heart of winter. Knowing that there is no salvation on the planet, they continue walking until the remnant

reaches an impassable peak. On that mountaintop they settle, watching each other's faces until, one after another, their eyes close for the last time.

Traditionally, this should be the end of the story. However, Planet Eight is not merely an elegy for a dying world, but also a testament to the "possibilities" that Sufism suggests. Evolution to higher states of understanding is a tenet of Sufi philosophy, and Planet Eight's conclusion suggests one such route of evolution. Death is followed not by rebirth but by continuing life in a new form. Leaving their heavy bodies behind, the citizens of Planet Eight have become the Representative, preserving their separate identities within the one unit that continues upward and away from the planet of ice. Suddenly they can appreciate the beauty of snowflakes instead of fearing the snow, and feel the lightness of their new form as they gaze down on the old bodies that look "like a herd of beasts crouched in sleep" (117).

All of the truths which Johor has been trying to have them see are now self-evident, as well as the multitude of potential lives that they might have lived, or which they do live in other, unrecognized forms. Like the excitement that pervades Marriages' zones after the boundaries have been opened, the Representative can finally see his/their potential.

The Representative who tells this story has now come "here, where Canopus tends and guards and instructs" (121). His learning is not finished, but merely entering a different stage. From the Sufist view, he still has a multitude of

possible futures before him:

After physical death, the substantial spirit continues to exist, in one of ten forms. . . . the first being that of the 'sincere,' the tenth being that of the Sufi who has been transformed in nature. (Shah Sufis 447)

Since the level on which the Representative resides is unknown, the implication remains that there are still many more routes to be explored by this successful student of the Way.

Planet Eight, like Marriages, ends on this note of spiritual success. Thus, through either the joys of life or the pains of death, utopia is achievable in these mystical worlds of Sufist potential that Lessing offers as promise. The insights necessary for a student's advancement are re-pictured in Planet Eight, repeating many of the Sufistic themes previously noted in other Canopus in Argos books: the knowledge that comes through insight rather than lecturing, a comprehension of the myriad levels and forms of existence that Sufism believes possible, and the need for a Higher Understanding. These themes mesh with Lessing's long-time search for the ideal society that lives in harmony with its collective unconscious. Each book in her latest series merely adds another perspective to the vision that Lessing has been seeking, expressed in terms of her still evolving Sufist philosophy.

CHAPTER THREE

The Sirian Experiments

and

The Sentimental Agents

In contrast with the pictures of successful evolution and spiritual insight that Marriages and Planet Eight offer, books three (The Sirian Experiments) and five (The Sentimental Agents) return to the less utopian outlook that Shikasta first described. Their stories reflect the turmoil of worlds that do not share in Canopus' communal wisdom or an understanding of the Necessity. These books are presented in the form of reports dictated by individuals in disagreement with the cultures in which they find themselves. Their topics concern the pain and waste which is an inevitable result of Disharmony. The storyline of both books broadly follows the efforts by Canopus to limit the damage caused by man's ill-considered actions, and the mystical empire's attempts to educate potential emissaries in the Canopean path of both personal and social insight. Unlike the successful folk tales that Marriages and Planet Eight relate, Experiments and Agents are stories without final resolution. Utopia has not been achieved, but nonetheless, Canopus' students are learning, and the spiritual empire's endeavors will continue.

Canopus in Argos' third and fifth books also reflect Mrs. Lessing's Sufist beliefs, this time in a less mystical and more practical study of Western man's failure. The concluding

books detail Sufism's perception of occidental society as a world doomed to perpetual failure because of its flawed view of existence. Like Sirius' experiments or Volyen's politics, man's actions are doomed to futility by society's inability to see the Sufist truth that all facets of existence are interrelated. Society's present emphasis on technology, on short-sighted action, and on superficial philosophies will not bring it fulfillment. Without Sufism's guidance, Lessing suggests, mankind's actions will be at best futile and unsatisfying, and at worst, cruelly destructive. Salvation can only be achieved through the clearer thinking and fresh insights that Sufism's better way provides, as it spreads its philosophy through the actions of a few courageous individuals.

The Sirian Experiments returns to earth, both in its setting and in its philosophic concerns. Having established her Sufist interpretation of earth's history in Shikasta, Lessing's analysis becomes even more localized in Experiments as she examines the failure of Western society to satisfy its population's spiritual needs. The Sirian Empire is, for Lessing, the embodiment of Western thought; Ambien II is its spokeswoman, an apologist for her philosophically bankrupt society which has grown rich and powerful through its belief in scientific progress and technology. Ambien's "revisionist history" of Sirius' experiments on Shikasta, written after her conversion to a Canopean perspective, becomes a critique of Western society and a forum for discussion of the holistic Necessity that controls both Canopus and an unknowing world.

Simultaneously, Experiments traces Ambien's own growth in spiritual understanding through Canopus' patient tutelage. The Sirian experiments are not only the cruel scientific tests conducted by the Sirian Empire on itself and others: they are also the spiritual changes which Ambien and her society undergo under the subtle direction of Canopus. Ultimately, the Sirian Empire is not the director of this experiment, but rather its subject. ¹

The story line of The Sirian Experiments records Ambien II's recollection of her career as director of experiments on the two southern continents of Shikasta (although Ambien always prefers the more hopeful name, Rohanda). As one of the Sirian Empire's five co-rulers, Ambien is responsible for developing new strains of servant workers for use in the empire, and many of her recollections concern Sirius' attempts at forced evolution of species in Shikasta's fertile atmosphere. The projects' inevitable failures, due to inadequate planning and poor implementation, eventually result in Shikasta's

1. Critical evaluations of The Sirian Experiments are rare. The third book of Canopus' quintet received almost no attention compared with the series' introductory and concluding books. Betsy Drane analyzes Experiments in relation to its companion books, emphasizing the effective contrast of its single narrative voice in a "realistic" science fiction style with the multiple narratives and more mystically oriented books that Experiments supports ("Sirian Experiments" 168-73). Experiments is contrasted with the first two Canopus books in Thomas White's discussion of perceived political futility in Lessing's quintet. He traces the emotions of pride and pity as corrupters of political wisdom through Ambien's and Canopus' viewpoints ("Opposing Necessity and Truth" 134-147). Mona Knapp attempts to relate Experiments to Scott's expedition, finding parallels between Ambien's and Scott's hardships in pursuit of new horizons ("Sirian Experiments" 139-43).

contamination by the rejected products of Sirius' biosociological experiments. The cultures that develop add to the malign effects of Shikasta's loss of Harmony and help to speed its degeneration. Ambien's history simultaneously recounts her education by Klorathy, Canopus' emissary, as he attempts to persuade Sirius to help in controlling Shikasta's decline. Their frequent meetings become the setting for Ambien's conversion to a Canopean understanding of the world, thus planting the first seeds of spiritual change in Sirius itself. Ambien's attempts to understand the forces which have directed her education result in this book, Ambien's "history of the heart," her declaration of faith.

The first section of the Experiments tale relates Ambien's psychological history of the Sirian Empire, from "the old days" up through Sirius' involvement with Shikasta. While noting the prosperity which she and her co-rulers have brought to their empire, Ambien's history of her rule is not at all congratulatory. The Sirian Empire's material success has not brought tranquility, but just its opposite, universal discontent. Due to its affluence, Sirius is beginning to decay from within.

In its history, the Sirian Empire resembles Doris Lessing's Sufist view of the Western world in many aspects. Ambien's narrative chronicles several of the deficiencies which Sufists see as emblematic of Western culture: unease amidst affluence, an inability to answer man's deeper questions about existence, insistence on narrow scientific interpretations, or suspicion

of unfamiliar views. In his Review of Sufi Studies, Leonard Lewin elaborates on this perspective, stating views which form the background of Lessing's Sirian Empire:

What, then, is defective with modern Western culture . . . ? Basically, it is overly materialistic and spiritually weakened. Despite great material and scientific progress, hypocrisy and intolerance are rife, and the deadly failings of greed and vanity are built into the very structure of society. Education in the West is, with some exceptions, too fact-oriented, and is failing to produce men and women of adequate quality. In fact, Western psychology, starting with Freud, has misunderstood the nature of man, the concentration having been on man's similarities to the animals, not on his creativity, which is what distinguishes him from them. . . . But with present materialist trends unchecked, civilization itself is threatened, and Sufism as a counterbalance to the damage stemming from greed and worldly vanity is needed. And the West, particularly, is now ripe for these ideas.
(359)

Such an indictment of Western society meshes easily with Lessing's fiction. The author's own well-known criticism of western culture has been a consistent note running through the many changes that her work and her beliefs have undergone. From Lessing's youthful anti-apartheid stance in Rhodesia, through her espousal of communism and of radical psychoanalysis with its "belief that schizophrenia is a sane response to an insane world" (Hazleton 27), to the evolutionary philosophy that Sufism provides, Lessing's mistrust of conventional western wisdom has been well-recorded. Sufism's insistence on tolerance and a shedding of all "cultural biases" blends well with Lessing's criticism of Western society. Experiments allows her to combine both strains in the creation of her fictional Sirian Empire as she analyzes the mythical empire's spiritual

crisis.

The Sirian Empire's inability to control events is a result of its incomplete, fragmented understanding of its own nature. Philosophically, the empire has defined itself solely in materialist terms, with its main goal being the assurance of its people's physical comforts. Scientifically, the Sirians regard their fates as being shaped by unrelated events, ignoring the interrelationships between organisms and actions that affect all of existence. Like the pointless materialism that Sufists decry and the short-sighted actions imposed by governments "in the public interest," the Sirians have become the victims, rather than the determiners of their world-view.

Consequently, Ambien and the Five's attempts to direct their empire's destiny are continually frustrated, as unperceived factors thwart the rulers' planning and social experimentation. In retrospect, Ambien is forced to label her government a failure. She sums up her oligarchy's effect on Sirius with the flat statement that "our set of mind has been one that has consistently led us into wrong judgement" (9). Despite their good intentions, the Five have not succeeded in ensuring peace and well-being for its citizens:

The hapless millions, offered by their triumphantly successful leaders plenty, leisure, freedom from want, from fear, from effort, showed every symptom of mass psychosis, ranging from random and purposeless violence to apparently causeless epidemics and widespread neurosis. (14)

Not understanding the causes for such behavior, the Sirians initially dub their incomprehension "the existential problem"

and attempt several social programs intended to make work for their society's useless populations. The empire's social experiments take many different forms, like the "invented usefulness" that deliberately rejects some aspects of technology in order to make people feel needed--but fools no one because of its obvious artificiality. Another such experiment becomes known as "the pastimes of the rich," as part of a glorification of rural values and methods. However, like many Western countries' full employment programs and "back to nature" trends, the Sirians' agrarian fad also fails when people realize that it too is only a pastime, not an answer to their "inner drive toward transcendence" (16). A third solution with more drastic consequences is selective reduction of the population, in order to limit the Sirian Empire's labor pool. In the ruling Five's hope that simple cures will fix complex problems, they declare that "Thus did our technological advances announce to ourselves. . . that what governed the coming into existence, or not, of an individual, was work" (17). For the good of the empire--although economic justifications for population reduction are always denied--Sirius' planners declare most of its people to be superfluous. As people simply die from uselessness, however, Sirius' rulers are forced to admit that this draconian solution, like most of the other decisions that they have made, is merely a reaction to events; indeed "it had to be recognized and acknowledged that we were not in control of what we did" (17). Yet lacking any other plan of action, and

trusting in their wisdom, the Five merely continue reacting to events. Finally, the rulers begin sending dissatisfied sufferers of "the existentials" out to colonize new planets and perform crude biological and sociological experiments on less evolved "animals" in the interest of science--like the spheres of influence and scientific enquiry which have become tenets of the modern world.

Ambien's introduction to Shikasta is during one of these "experiments." Desperate for unskilled laborers, since the Sirian empire's people now regard manual labor with contempt, Ambien attempts to create a permanent servant class out of "suitable animals" whom she has imported to Shikasta (like the populations civilized under British colonial policy or the guest workers so common in European society). When this "biosociological experiment" fails like all the rest, Ambien abandons her project, unconcerned about the fate of several subjects which have escaped from their camp. While admitting to a sense of disquiet about Sirius' machinations, Ambien refuses to accept guilt for the experiments, rationalizing her actions as necessary for the furtherance of Sirius, and contributing to man's scientific knowledge. It is at this point, however, that Canopus enters the picture.

Looking back from her new-found Canopean perspective, Ambien II later describes Sirius' "problem" as one not of intellectual lack, primarily, but rather of self-delusion. Her analysis of Sirian motives has a familiar ring in its description of a society's subjective self-image:

no: the dispassionate, disinterested eye we use for other peoples, other histories, we do not easily turn on ourselves--past or present! . . . Is it possible that our reluctance to regard ourselves as we do others is because we do not like to categorize our own existence as physical. . . merely physical? (61)

Ambien's description of Sirius' main problem is summed up as a dedication to "technology: our technical achievements that no other empire has ever even approached" (62). Sirius' dedication to the applied sciences does not, however, include an understanding of technology's consequences for society, but focuses only on its materialistic effects, ignoring any possible ramifications. When their empire begins to crumble, the Sirians cannot perceive their error, and find themselves again asking their age-old existential question: what is the purpose of a society? The hollowness of Sirius' materialistic success has created an atmosphere of self-doubt, conducive to Canopus in its own Sirian experiment, the recruitment of Ambien as a potential student into its mystical wisdom.

Correspondingly, the relatively recent openness of Western culture to new insights, as old religious and philosophical beliefs are rejected, provides a greater opportunity for spreading of Sufi beliefs than ever before. In the opinion of Desmond Martin, a Western Sufi:

Western minds are often more open than Eastern minds to the kind of thinking that I am describing. . . . Western thought has already run the gamut of materialism and logic and is in many cases reaching out for something greater. (150)

Having reached such a point, Western society may now be ready to admit the failure of its philosophic view and accept insight

into a more complete vision of life.

With that philosophical theory as a basis, Lessing adds a second theme to the The Sirian Experiments. Through Ambien's description of her halting steps toward Canopean understanding, Lessing provides a picture of the development of a Western student of Sufist thought from the student's own perspective. Unwittingly called by the Canopeans to become a Master for her own people's illumination, Ambien II herself becomes the subject of Canopus' Sirian experiments.

By using a novice's viewpoint, Lessing is able to delineate a few of the methods by which a seeker can approach Sufism, providing a more personal picture of the path to enlightenment than the detached view of a Sufi Master allows. Unlike the grand perspective that Johor represents in Shikasta, Ambien approaches Sufism from a student's orientation, becoming herself a potential guide for seekers of the Sufist way. The story of Ambien's growing awareness of higher knowledge is a chronicle of the first difficult steps toward Sufist understanding.

In addition, Ambien's history of her education in Canopean wisdom--from mild curiosity to full commitment--provides a stage for Lessing to re-emphasize or elaborate on many Sufi beliefs or procedures. Through Ambien, Lessing creates in the archetypal student a picture that may serve as a help in the spread of Sufist wisdom.

Ambien II's introduction to Canopean thought develops along lines that parallel the reception of most new ideas: suspicion and hostility. Having once been defeated by Canopus

in a long-ago war, Sirius views Canopus with a lack of understanding that is only matched by its distrust. Despite Canopus' apparent amicability, the Sirian rulers are convinced of their rival's treachery and dark designs. At the same time, since Canopus' colonies appear less developed to the technologically-oriented Sirians, Ambien and her co-rulers also regard Canopus with contempt for its inferior knowledge, even while Sirius steals both Canopean knowledge and Canopean settlers. Their hostility parallels Sufism's traditional reception. In her article on Sufism, Lessing notes that such "treatment [is] not surprising: people persecute or ignore what they do not understand" ("In the World" 131).

Nonetheless, out of suspicion comes curiosity about motives, and hopefully, investigation. Ambien the loyal bureaucrat volunteers to "develop a relationship" with Klorathy, in order to learn more about Canopus, and also because of something in him that Ambien describes thus:

that inward, brooding questioning, wondering, that one may sometimes feel about a person whose sources of action, of being, seem distant and other--as if understanding this being may open doors in oneself whose existence one does not do more than suspect. (66)

It is only later that Ambien discovers that her actions had been anticipated, even encouraged by Canopus. Klorathy is waiting for her on Rohanda (soon to become Shikasta), preparing himself for her education. Embodying the Sufist belief that when a Student is ready for a Master, the Master will find him (Sufism 13), Ambien comes under Klorathy's tutelage when she is finally

ready to learn from him, drawn by Canopus' telepathic suggestions and prescience.

However, Ambien's road to Canopean insight is not as smoothly accomplished as she imagines it will be. Despite Klorathy's willingness to demonstrate aspects of the Necessity, his refusal to answer direct questions first puzzles, then irritates Ambien. The points that Klorathy does emphasize, such as the quality of evil that he calls "Shammatt-nature," seem either too obvious or unimportant to Sirius' impatient leader, with her load of preconceptions. Even an explanation by her mate, Ambien I, that "Klorathy did not make any attempt to communicate what he thought until he was asked a direct question--or until something was said that was in fact a question though it was masked as a comment" (91), only serves to infuriate her further. The final straw is Klorathy's statement that "if you want to understand, then I suggest you stay on here for a time" (93). Rejecting Klorathy's unfamiliar form of instruction, unready to learn, Ambien leaves. Her response is typical of the Sufi novice who:

cannot perceive or coherently discuss until a certain basic information process has taken place in his mind. . . . the reaction of the school-child who has come up against something which he cannot, at least at the moment, rationalize or fully understand. (Shah "Teaching Story" 70)

Ambien's next encounter with Klorathy, equally full of

potential, again is rejected because of her (at least admitted) prejudices. This meeting exposes Ambien to Planet 11's unfamiliar life forms: the telepathic, adaptable and highly evolved insect-like creatures who survive solely on air and have reached a higher understanding of their "potential." So alien to Ambien's insular view of humanity are they that the Sirian rejects an opportunity to meet them despite Klorathy's urging. Her refusal is couched in terms of antipathy at nature's diversity: "I have never been able to overcome an instinctive abhorrence for creatures dissimilar to my own species" (102-03). Moreover, the disorienting atmosphere on Planet 11 with its "exhausting" rotation is too much of a strain on Ambien, and results in her flat rejection of this new world and all its potential lessons: "'I don't think Colony 11 suits me'" (103). Like many students, Ambien can still only accept truths in familiar forms. Her willingness to learn, while growing, is not yet sufficiently strong to accept the multiple possibilities that evolution may offer. Like many hopeful Sufi beginners, Ambien in these early stages still cannot recognize potential in unfamiliar patterns, although she still is determined to discover Canopus' secrets. Klorathy recognizes Ambien's weakness, and offers her another chance, which she accepts. Learning from this failure, Ambien becomes devoted enough to understanding Canopean wisdom that Klorathy begins a new phase, arranging situations for her to experience under the guidance of various Canopean emissaries.

In Sufism, this second stage of education involves entry

into "work situations" under the auspices of a Master, "carried out by the teacher in accordance with his perception of the situation in which he finds himself" (Sufi Abdul-Hamid 59). The experiences that a student must undergo vary in response to his need for enlightenment. The events may be mundane or frightening, silly, humiliating or exhilarating. Their intention is to precipitate "a time of cramped, thoughtful living" (Lessing, "An Ancient Way" 81), developing a student's insight and comprehension of reality. To illustrate the potential of such learning situations, Lessing has Ambien experience several very diverse Shikastan societies, protected less by her Canopean mentors in each situation. The lessons that Ambien absorbs illuminate aspects of Sufist thought, as represented by Canopus.

The first such situation that Ambien encounters occurs in Koshi, a decadent city doomed to vanish into the Persian deserts. Klorathy's preparatory instructions to Ambien test her newfound deference to a Teacher's authority, as she prepares to confront directly the grasping, sensuous evil that is Shammat. The lessons that she learns reveal Canopean concepts so alien to Sirius' philosophy that Ambien can only absorb a bit of them at first. Her meeting with Nasar is the first shock, when she recognizes the "essence," the "great soul" of Sufist thought (Shah Sufis 421), which all the Canopeans share, shining through the different bodies that Nasar, Klorathy, and other emissaries assume and discard with such ease. Even more importantly, Ambien's confrontation with evil in several of its

guises affects her strongly. Ambien variously describes her recognition of Canopus' foe as a "heavy, dead weight" (121), "a variation of the existential question, or affliction" (134), and most eloquently, as the force that exploits weakness in order to destroy man from within: "What is Shammat--it is that if you say Love, then before long, it is Hate, and if you build for harmony, then soon it is quarreling, and if you say Peace, then before long it is War" (145). In her uninformed state, Ambien can see only the results of Shammat's evil, like its ability to tempt even the Canopean emissary Nasar to despair. Comprehension of its essence is still beyond her grasp, as is knowledge of how--and why--to fight its power.

Ambien's need of that insight becomes a guiding force behind her next trips into Shikasta's turmoil, in responding to "the steady, unstoppable growth in me of that person or individual who was not 'Sirius'" (158). Ambien's experience in the Aztec city of Grakconkranpatl is an immersion into the heart of evil, as Ambien perceives it: a culture devoid of freedom and ruled by the priestly caste which epitomizes "implacable strength and brutality" (168). Ambien's very appearance almost precipitates her death--another new concept for the Sirian whose longevity is surgically produced, in contrast to Canopus' physical changeability. Rhodia (Nasar again in different form), who rescues Ambien and other slaves as part of the emissary's duty, comes to signify, in Ambien's view, man's potential for salvation as well as for corruption: "the two currents that are in every situation if one learns to

recognize them" (178-79). Rhodia's responsibility for saving the Sirian and some slaves, however, seems to Ambien to be too minor an accomplishment to be a worthy life's task for such an important figure. Like many spiritual initiates, Ambien finds it hard to accept that enlightenment may also involve mundane work in a fallible world. However, Canopus, like Sufism, insists that aid to, if not the eventual salvation of all men is also part of a student's responsibility. Rejection of the world is not a Sufist's choice.

In spite of the danger that she has faced, Ambien still mistakes the results of evil for their sources, and because of her inability to absorb that lesson, Rhodia exposes Ambien to yet another immersion in Shikastan culture. This third major experience is the most beautiful, and the most devastating experience of all for a proud Sirian seeker after insight.

The city-state of Lelanos becomes Ambien's introduction to Eden--a community in complete harmony with Canopus' earthly plan. Lelanos finally provides Ambien with the picture of perfection that she has been seeking from her teachers. The rules of its governance combine Sufist and Lessing's own concepts of the ideal city, emphasized once again. Its architecture, its elective democracy and monetary policies, and its encouragement of balance in all parts of a person's (and a society's) life mesh into a utopian picture of Canopean Harmony.

Lelanos' inevitable downfall is a harsh lesson for Ambien to accept, despite Rhodia's explanation that "there is nothing

that can be done to arrest the laws of Rohanda, . . . or indeed, of the universe'" (194). The dark side of Canopean (and Sufist) Necessity seems so unfair to Ambien that she succumbs, through her rebellion, to the power of Shammata. In her unwillingness to accept the inevitable cycles of nature, Ambien sides with Tafta, Shammata's chief agent, in an abortive attempt to reverse Lelanos' slide into chaos. In her rebellion, Ambien falls for Tafta's guile, and later admits that "I wanted with all my present self--the self brought into being by Shammata--to rule this city, and to strengthen my inner feebleness by doing as Canopus did" (204). Not until she has helped with Lelanos' betrayal does Ambien recognize her defeat by Shammata--and learn the lesson that Canopus has been trying to teach her. At first, Ambien is angrier about the source of her failure than at her fall. Because she hasn't fallen before something "really wicked," Ambien's main feeling is humiliation; then come the glimmerings of insight:

Was I then to understand, from my weakening towards Tafta, that the beginnings of an immersion in evil must always start with something easy, paltry, seemingly unimportant? Was this what Canopus had been teaching me? (210)

Her experiences cause Ambien to more closely evaluate the Sufist concepts of good and evil, and its ramifications for unity or individualism, free will and the tendency toward disharmony. The philosophic tenets that form Sufist understanding of the concept of God and evil (Berger 141) become for Ambien the focus of Canopean "Harmony and Necessity."

Even in her rebellion, despite Ambien's desire for her old,

comfortable beliefs, she is still developing in the Way. Despite fleeing Shikasta's battlegrounds, Ambien finds within her an almost unwelcome unity with the Canopean mind that haunts her, calling "Sirius, Sirius. . . and I could not free myself of it. . . in voices I had never heard but know I would" (212).

Finally, weary of fighting the call, Ambien returns to Shikasta to meet Klorathy once more. Following a reluctant tour of Lelanos' brutal "experimentation labs," so ominously similar to those that Sirius uses in development of its own "technology," Ambien is forced to admit the similarities between depraved Shikasta's and Sirius' own apprehension of life's purposes. Consequently, Ambien's suggestion that they should "call in our fleet of Flame Makers and destroy these squalid little animals" (231) becomes an unwitting statement of self-condemnation, from which she is only reluctantly dissuaded. The tour does have one notable result, however, when Ambien returns to Sirius and begins changing public opinion concerning Sirius' own experimentation program. The next phase of Ambien's education--that of overt commitment to at least some facets of Canopean wisdom--has begun.

On her next trip to Shikasta, Ambien finally engages Klorathy in a direct discussion of Sirius' view of existence. Her defense of Sirius' ways, the comfortable world view of its superiority, is revealed for the "mirage" that it is, concluding with the collapse of the student's final cultural defenses: "I cannot stand . . . what we are," only to be

reassured by Klorathy's assurance of progress: "it is not what you will be" (242).

Ambien's allegiance has shifted to her new mystical leader --Canopus--leaving behind the familiar unity of her old world. At this final rejection of her pre-conditioned past, Ambien becomes a Sufi student, rather than a seeker. However, the transition is not easy. Upon her return to Sirius, Ambien attends a meeting with her co-rulers, only to find their aeons-long mental communion shattered:

I found myself, as we took our seats, looking
into the faces of these colleagues of mine, . . .
who make up with me, a whole, an organism,
almost an organ of the Sirian body. And . . .
I was at the same time anguished, being so
distanced from them, so alien in part of myself,
because of Canopus. (256)

As the leaders of Sirius, the Five have always functioned in mental unity; their frequently unspoken discussions have led Sirius through its epochs of empire. Now Ambien's new loyalties, threatening though they are to Sirius' long-held beliefs, begin to sway the Four. While the rulers ponder this challenge to their age-old philosophy, the rest of Sirian society, which has never shared in their decisions or in their unity of mind, becomes caught up in the conflict.

At the conclusion of her book, Ambien II is in exile, physically separated from her cohorts but still in communication with them spiritually. The outcome of Canopus' Sirian experiment is still in doubt, while Ambien puzzles over the revelations that have shaken her world. She finds herself the object of questions from her four co-rulers, whose puzzled

demands echo Ambien's earlier badgering of Klorathy:

"You tell us nothing, nothing."

"I tell you everything I can."

"Ambien, you are going to have to tell us." (285)

Ambien is being pressed toward service as a Teacher for her co-rulers, even while she is still in doubt of her own understanding. The tale leaves her at the crossroads. Will Ambien accept that the evolutionary change of Sirius' opinion, which has been introduced through her portion of the "group mind," will spread throughout society as one of the "ideas that must flow through humanity like tide" (ix), as Lessing intimates? Or will she choose to lecture her half-formed thoughts to the even less prepared questioners, thus becoming the false teacher that Sufis warn of:

"the inner spiritual path is narrow and difficult. Even sincere seekers can become enticed by the allurements of spiritual jingoism before they become aware that they have fallen." (Meher Baba, qtd. in Sufism 11)

However, despite her uncertain future, Ambien's recruitment into Canopean thought has been at least partially successful. She has been led to an awareness of Sirius' incomplete knowledge of life, and offered a glimpse of Canopus' more complete understanding of existence. Ambien's potential development through Canopus' Sufist-inspired insight offers hope both for her and for the society that she represents.

Therefore, a better understanding of Canopean Necessity becomes a logical next step in Ambien's spiritual advancement. The last pages of Experiments, consequently, are devoted to her

puzzled analysis of the "group mind" that may unify mankind, and the mechanisms which effect change in the organism that is a society. Ambien's ruminations allow Lessing the opportunity to elaborate on that third theme, the unrecognized but all-powerful collective mind, and its effects on society through the "tides of ideas" that control man's beliefs and his actions.

One of Lessing's admitted preoccupations, this concept of forces that affect society's thought appears as themes in both Experiments and Agents, and is even more directly addressed in addenda to two of this series' books. Experiments' "Preface" first mentions the theory of ideas that "flow through humanity like tides" as part of Lessing's attempt "to put questions, both to myself and to others; to explore ideas and sociological possibilities" (ix). The "Afterword" to Planet Eight amplifies that theme, discussing the ramifications of such an unrecognized controlling mind on society's beliefs, via an analysis of the attitudes that motivated both Scott's Antarctic expedition and World War I.

The first aspect of Lessing's theory deals with the ways that acceptable social views change, such as the transition from idolization of Scott's quest to an amazement at his self-destructive obsession, or the determination of pre-war socialists not to participate in war's useless slaughter--something which later becomes a fervent espousal of "the War to end all war." Lessing's suspicion that "this is a law at work" (127) results in her plea for study into such patterns, in hope of avoiding the

pointless tragedies that fill the world's history books.

In Experiments, the idea of a group mind controlling its members' beliefs is first openly broached during Ambien's discussions with her visitors in exile. In her attempt to understand the processes underlying her role as an agent of change, Ambien declares that:

"what we are seeing are only mechanisms, machineries, that is all. . . let us consider these group minds . . . these little individuals making up wholes. Sets of ideas making up a whole can be very large, for instance, when they are occupying a national area, and millions will go to war for opinions that may very well be different or even opposite only a decade later--and die in their millions. Each is part of this vast group mind and cannot think differently, not without risking madness, or exile or . . ." (273)

However, Ambien pursues her train of thought even further in contemplating the effect that a "deviant individual" will have on the whole organism. By either uniting or converting sympathetic individuals (as she is affecting the Four), the power of a disaffected member may grow:

his own deviant opinions becoming 'respectable,' ousting or questioning the former standards, so that he as an individual has ceased to be a threat, but on the contrary has become stabilized in the new orthodoxy (280)

--for better or for worse, as Sirius' and Shikasta's histories show.

That train of thought leads Ambien to one further puzzle, as she questions the source of such dissident views. Understanding the origins of change in all of its dimensions--social, spiritual, ecological, emotional, to name a

few--would be the first step in controlling or anticipating the course of history. Those answers, which could prove a key to solving the empire's "existential problem," come close to the heart of Canopean Necessity, the holistic understanding of existence that Canopus offers Ambien and her people. Without its all-encompassing perspective, Sirius' leaders will be doomed to eternal reaction, rather than anticipation of the empire's needs. The power that such knowledge offers, embodied in Canopus and its patient planetary experiments, is the final truth which Ambien must learn.

A less abstruse view of Lessing's theory may be gathered from several Sufist writings. According to scholars, one of the major steps in a Sufist's spiritual evolution involves the development of "latifa," described by Idries Shah as "an incipient organ of spiritual perception" (Sufis 332). Its power allows man the possibility of consciously uniting with the "great soul" which contains all thought and order. In their descriptions of the great soul, Sufis invoke Jungian thought as a partial explanation of their belief:

Jung's concepts are perhaps a little closer to the thrust of Sufi ideas: bringing the collective unconscious into public consciousness might be one way of trying to describe the present stage of psychic evolution. (Lewin Review 359)

Correlatively, the teachings of George Gurdjieff, a Russian Sufist of the early 1900s, speak in a mystical tone of the possibility of elevating man's instinct for unity to the conscious state. Until this occurs, mankind will be controlled by thoughts whose sources he cannot recognize. Since many of

the ideas received by the unconscious carry the potential for transforming human nature, the ability to consciously assimilate vital thoughts could be a major step on the road to evolutionary development (Needleman 208).

The final pages of The Sirian Experiments come closer than any other part of the Canopus in Argos series to articulating the shadowy philosophy which motivates Canopus' actions. Ambien's insights into the Necessity, as she develops from bureaucrat to Sufi student, provide a personal view of growth that supplements the bleaker, more circumscribed pictures that Shikasta's students offer. The growth in spiritual understanding that Ambien experiences under Canopus' tutelage will hopefully become the first stage in all of Sirius' evolution. Through the perspective of her conversion, Ambien offers an analysis of Western society's failings and the suggestion of a better Way that may guide other questioners toward a contemplation of Sufim's mystical belief.

The fifth and last book in Doris Lessing's Canopus in Argos quintet is a satire told from the same earthly perspective as Experiments, with Klorathy once again arranging events in the Argos galaxy. Documents Relating to the Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire is Lessing's final science-fiction forum from which to emphasize the need for Sufist logic in a world cursed by self-delusion. Agents satirizes the futility of humanity's blind belief in political action and obfuscating rhetoric, while ignoring the practical wisdom that Sufist thought offers as a better way. The Volyens' posturing speeches, futile

'revolutions' and political sophistry become representative of the mindless actions which have kept both nations and their populations in turmoil throughout history; and Klorathy, the Canopean emissary who offers the Volyens a better alternative to their internecine (again noticeably European) struggles, becomes once more an embodiment of Sufist rationality in an irrational world. By satirizing the waste that futile power struggles and speechifying causes, Lessing emphasizes the hopeless situation of "politics as usual" to improve mankind's lot, and offers her Sufist philosophy as the world's only real hope for stability.

One of Agents' themes, the mind-clouding tendencies of rhetoric, springs partially from criticism which Lessing has been receiving for her newest philosophic beliefs. When the Canopus in Argos books began appearing, Lessing's former readers and critics were nearly unanimous in their dismay.² Her literary shift from chronicles of "contemporary human relations and political movements" (Rothstein 7) to Sufist

2. Reviews of The Sentimental Agents have been in near agreement about the book's heavy-handed satire and political indifference. Harriet Gilbert detects a sinister message running through Agents, dissolving man from responsibility for his actions in a world where all beliefs are equally pointless ("ET's" 23). Edward Rothstein's review concurs, adding to its discussion of political futility a second theme that questions Lessing's view of rhetoric within the context of a book which is itself essentially a piece of rhetoric ("Against Galactic Rhetoric" 7+). Both Michiko Kakutani and Susan Lardner are concerned with Lessing's poor use of satire. Kakutani likens Agents to Swift and Orwell's style of political satire, with which this book compares poorly (Review C16), and Lardner discusses Agents' literary and philosophical "awkwardness" in terms of the "gawky prose" that describes the entire Canopus series of books ("Angle on the Ordinary" 140-54).

mysticism was paralleled by political actions such as Lessing's formation of NuPAG--a civil defense pressure group. The organization's belief in the survivability of nuclear war--a necessity for man's eventual Sufist evolution--resulted in violent verbal attacks upon Lessing from many disarmament groups. In an interview with Lesley Hazleton, Lessing describes the total breakdown in communication that resulted from her advocacy of civil defense:

"You can't even raise these possibilities with the peace movement. Clouds of rhetoric, all words, words, words, and no cool consideration of the facts. . . . if you disagree with them, they say you are a fascist or a C.I.A. agent and that's the end of it. (28-29)

Temporarily disregarding the issues that provoked such attacks, Lessing focuses on the effects of such pronouncements:

"This word 'fascist' is one of the great words at the moment that stops everyone from thinking. You have only to say that so-and-so's a fascist and that's the end of any reason; you can't think after that. I wish there could be a ban put on the use of the word." (29).

Those reactions concerning the power of some words to interfere with thought merge with Lessing's well-known political liberalism and her Sufist philosophy in Agents. Through the Volyens' machinations and heroic stances, Lessing emphasizes the power of rhetoric to disguise a society's realization of its true motivating factors. Without the essential self-perception which rhetoric clouds, man cannot begin to recognize the cycles that control his actions. In Agents, the danger that false words present is described in terms of a malady, the

"rhetorical disease" that is endemic throughout the Volyen Empire. Its main symptom is a false trust in words, especially political phrases, although useless emotional outbursts are frequent side-effects. Through Klorathy's cynical eyes, the damage that rhetorical diseases inflict on a society is revealed, as the Canopean narrator attempts to mitigate the disease's effects. His weapons of common sense and alternative suggestions to the prevailing war preparations initially appear too low key to have any effect, but patiently reflect the Sufist belief that only an accurate use of words and their meanings, without the cultural biases that distort understanding, will save humanity from its age-old misery.

The planets in the Volyen Empire, enduring epidemics of rhetorical fever and waves of invasion, also reveal themselves as manifestations of Lessing's latest political views. In their governmental structures, along with the attributes and loyalties of their citizens, the "Volyens" are only thinly veiled representations of modern European countries. In the course of the Agents' tale, the various planets' all-too fallible societies provide Lessing with an opportunity to fictionally restate her Sufist disregard for the petty concerns that traditionally have absorbed the world's attention, while humanity ignores ideas which could offer true salvation.

Within the Volyens' self-absorbed universe, the main source of disharmony comes from the Sirian Empire, as it wrestles with a stalled spiritual revolution. While Canopus waits for Ambien II and her co-rulers to attain the

enlightenment that will bring peace, the emissaries try to contain damage that Sirius' territorial expansions and civil wars have caused. In its rejection of its communal ideals, Sirius bears a striking resemblance to Lessing's post-1956 view of Communist Russia. Her disillusion with the grand experiment, occasioned by Russia's invasion of Hungary and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin (Rothstein 7), has been replaced by the tenets of Sufism. The transition from failed revolution to false Sufi Master is reinforced by the empires' self-proclaimed benevolence while establishing ruthless dictatorships in unwilling colonies.

Sirius' doomed rival for power is Volyen, the decadent, spy-ridden planet that corresponds to Lessing's present home, England. Watching its colonies slowly slip away, Volyen itself has begun to believe the Sirian propaganda that paints it as "shoddy and pitiful and corrupt and lying" (80). Despite the irony that Volyen "is rather a pleasant place" (82), relatively democratic and concerned for its people's welfare, tolerant of the free speech that is epitomized in the self-mocking chest button reading "Volyen Rules: OK?" (140), many of its ruling class' citizens have been persuaded to work for its overthrow by the much greater tyrant, Sirius. Although famous for her youthful denunciation of Britain, Lessing has come to an appreciation of its compassionate qualities during her long residence in London. While still condemning its colonialist and supremacist tendencies, Lessing has mellowed in the light of Sufi philosophy into a sympathy for Britain's now harmless, if

self-deluded, ways. In her article "Going Home," Lessing even admits that she has come "to feel at home in London, to find it 'the pleasantest of cities'" (qtd. in Larder 141). In the Agents' Sufist perspective, Volyen is a tolerant though short-sighted country that is facing its decline with dignity. Its people's common sense and acceptance of their position in the cycle of power reflect a mature, though somewhat uncomprehending view of Sufist inevitability.

The other planets that are involved with the Volyen Empire--Volyenadna, Volyendesta, Makin and Slovin--perform the functions of colonies and satellites for the ever-changing empires. Makin and Slovin especially, with their Balkan-sounding names, act the parts of middle-European countries caught up in Soviet bloc maneuvering. Their location in the Argos galaxy places them directly in the path of Sirian expansionism; Makin's politically induced self-image as "the heir of Sirian Virtue" (168) provides the Sirian-directed planet with the rationalization that it needs to attack its neighbor Volyendesta. The planets' endless revolutions, invasions, defenses and plots merely serve to reinforce the turmoil which keeps the empire from prosperity. Like Europe's seemingly endless conflicts, attention to the minutiae of their differences has blinded the Volyens to their essential unity.

Consequently, after first establishing the settings and grievances of these noticeably European societies, Lessing proceeds to undercut the significance of their nationalistic battles. The purpose of the planets' always rationalized

machinations becomes as hollow as the rhetoric that characterizes their speeches. From her Sufist position, Lessing accentuates the waste of potential that the empire's cultural and nationalistic preoccupations cause. The planets' leaders become symbols for their countries' plights, such as Calder, the miners' leader on Volyenadna, who is so busy arguing politics that he refuses a new food supply for his starving people; or Ormarin, the chief revolutionary on Volyendesta who makes pious speeches denouncing Sirius while he oversees its road projects, built with slave labor. Their conquests and humiliations, speeches and strategies quickly blur into one another, leaving the planets nearly indistinguishable in a reader's mind. Their passions are as interchangeable as the political maneuvering that endlessly occupies Europe.

The only noticeable alternative to the Volyen Empire's eternal cycle of conquests is provided by Canopus' pacific and partially effective attempts to promote reason. Travelling from planet to planet, educating some leaders, thwarting others, offering alternatives to war and urging common sense in the face of florid rhetoric, Klorathy's repeated suggestions of rational action do finally stop the endless cycle of destruction--at least for this one era. When the Volyenadnans, faced with invasion, vow, "we shall fight them on the sands, we shall fight them on the cliffs, we shall fight them street by street of our cities, we shall fight them on the tundras--" (92), the Canopean emissary introduces a food source (the lichen called Rocknosh) which gives the people leverage for

negotiating with their hungry attackers instead. Similarly, Volyendesta's threat that they will repel an invasion by fighting "to the last drop of everyone's blood" (170) is transformed into a course of non-violent accommodation which absorbs their invaders painlessly into the Volyendestans' already heterogeneous society. Klorathy embodies the potential that an enlightened individual can offer for action, not through self-deluded battling but by the encouragement of rational thought and social welfare, wherever the student may find himself.

The clear-sightedness and tolerance which Canopus represents in its Volyen dealings echoes the Sufist themes that Experiments has pursued; in addition, Agents' plot links Volyen to Sirius in still other ways. For the first time in the Canopus in Argos quintet, Canopus is involved with an area that will never be part of its empire. Due to the Volyens' remote location in the Galaxy, the empire is a poor candidate for "Harmonic Cosmic Development," and until recently has been only under "Basic Surveillance" (5) by Canopus. However, as a result of the mystical empire's Sirian experiments through Ambien II, violent changes have rocked the Sirian Empire, for which Canopus is ultimately responsible. Ambien II, at the pressure of her co-rulers, has temporarily succumbed to the same pressure that defeated her at Lelanos. Under the delusion of understanding the Necessity, Ambien and her faction have arrived at "a premature conviction that they were already in possession of the real qualities" (74). In consequence of

their misunderstanding, the Sirian Empire has begun acquiring colonies once more, "seeing itself as the bringer of new benefits, because of its new description of itself" (76), although its unwilling colonists can't observe any difference in Sirius's actions. By the time that Canopus finally returns Ambien to the Path, rival factions have adopted her methods and self-glorifying propaganda, and "Sirian Virtue" has become the catchword for empire-building throughout the Argos Galaxy. Canopus, as a result, is acting in Volyen to minimize the effects of their failed student's actions. By emphasizing the reality that lies behind the galaxy's self-serving rhetoric, Klorathy hopes to dissuade the Volyens from practicing their continual invasions of each other and to return to a more rational approach to government. He is once more opposed by Shammat, in the person of Krolgul, who feeds on Disharmony as a "sort of pump or siphon to steal Canopean power" (159). The "revolutionary" activities and fevered speeches of the Volyens' competing factions are enriching the Shammatans, at the expense of Canopus and of the Volyen Empire.

The struggle between Krolgul and Klorathy becomes personalized in the form of Incent, Canopus' lost emissary. Incent is suffering from a virulent case of "Undulant Rhetoric"--an acute susceptibility to the false promise of words. His case takes the form of sentimentality and emotional overreaction to the crises that he sees all around him. Incent's symptoms range from a tearful embracing of political agitation as salvation, to its opposite, a masochistic remorse

over his weakness and the determination to triumph this time, from existential despair to an idealistic determination to convert Shammat on its own turf. Throughout Agents, Klorathy doggedly follows his patient around the empire, checking Incent into the "Hospital for Rhetorical Diseases," deflating the sufferer's tragic poses, and suggesting that Incent embrace rationality if he really wants to be cured. Although Klorathy continually predicts success in his reports home to Canopus, he has not succeeded in Incent's cure at the book's conclusion. Incent's cure is no more permanent than Shammat's defeat. The last letter to Canopus is written enroute to Shammat, where Incent has gone "to reform" Krolgul. And so the struggle continues.

Lessing uses Klorathy's and Incent's encounters with "sentimentality" to highlight the Sufists' emphasis on dispassionate thought as the only path to truly effective action. Whenever Incent strikes his noble poses, he creates more opportunities for Shammat, by clouding other men's minds as well as his own. In one city Incent's attempts to save the people by warning them about the dangers of tyranny causes a riot when his rhetoric inspires them to appoint him leader. Later Klorathy narrates still another encounter (which echoes notes in Lessing's own experience) by Incent in which the relapsed emissary attempts to prove his power over Krolgul. When the Shammatan throws epithets at him, stirring the crowd to anger, Incent withstands the assault until:

"Facist," . . . And that was that. . . In a moment he was one of them, shouting and screaming: Death

to. . .Down with. . .Blood. . . And so on. (128)

The Pavlovian response to words that affects Incent and the crowd is drawn with heavy satire, but the overall warning is clear--mankind will not be free from manipulation until it can perceive the reflexive responses that inflammatory rhetoric causes and begin to use reason in its deliberations.

The Schools of Rhetoric that Shammat has instituted on Volyen become factories for the production of 'sentimental agents' in the Volyen Empire. The students practice their communication skills with polished phrases as florid as they are empty:

"If we do not agree on the reasons for what has come to pass, then we will on the cure. We stand together here united in one thing, that the situation cannot go on like this. Why are we surrounded by gross inequalities, by appalling injustice, by dreadful poverty and cynical wealth." (60)

The speeches become another method for Shammat to ensure control over the forces of opinion that Lessing has also displayed in Experiments. By controlling the popular opinions of the Volyens' peoples, Shammat continually directs them away from self-control and toward blind responses to life's crises. The ensuing confusion can only add to the dissention that supports this "evil empire" of disharmony.

Ironically, it is another such attempt by Shammat to raise the level of revolutionary fever which provides the people of Volyen with a Sufist truth, a glimpse at the rules that actually control their lives. When Grice states that "empires

are like animal organisms; they have a curve of development and ultimate decay" (145), he inadvertantly provides his people with a description of the inevitable cycles which control every aspect of nature. By building on this Sufist theorem that underlies much of Canopean Necessity, the practical people of Volyen free themselves--and their supposed oppressors--of the guilt for actions which they never have actually controlled. This realization provides Klorathy with his first real victory, and begins to break Shammatt's hold on the people's minds. When man is finally able and willing to regard his situation logically rather than emotionally, evolution toward a higher, Canopean understanding of existence may be possible. For Sufists, this is at least a starting point toward man's multi-stage evolution.

By combining Sufist tenets as they mesh with her own political views in The Sentimental Agents, Lessing articulates her newly evolved philosophy, with its hopes for societal and mystical evolution one last time in the Canopus series of books. She suggests that Sufism's spiritual truths may be able to help break society's habit of self-delusion and so offer direction for mankind. As Agents intimates, Sufism's promise of illumination need not be only directions toward a remote spiritual utopia, but may also serve as a guide toward some common-sense answers to man's problems today.

CONCLUSION

Canopus in Argos is Doris Lessing's testament to the most recent stage in her ongoing personal evolution. Merging her iconoclastic views of history and society with the mystical philosophy that Sufism holds for her, Lessing creates in Canopus the utopia for which she has long searched. The Sufist ideal that Canopus embodies offers her readers Lessing's concept of fulfillment, a view of evolution that is possible both in man's relation with his world and with the potential worlds that his spirit aspires to.

Lessing's ideal community combines the best of man's impulses with the mystical perspective of Sufism. In the spiritual utopia that Canopus in Argos postulates, man lives within a holistic philosophy, combining a scientific interpretation of history's events with the spiritual insights that music and literature can ideally conjure. His cities may be of mathematical design, constructed solely of natural materials in dimensions that encourage harmony, rather than intimidating or depressing the mind. Governments will be egalitarian, preserving the best aspects of democratic decision-making and communist sharing. It will be a place, most of all, in which an individual can develop his potential without the constrictions of religious and cultural prejudices.

That world's sciences will have begun to explain the cycles that control all of life, combining their dimensions--social, physical, mental--into a sociobiological view of existence.

Like the Necessity that sustains Canopus, humanity's understanding of the universe's unchanging laws will allow it to anticipate events and minimize their traumas.

In Lessing's utopian world, man will see himself as a part of an organism that still sustains his uniqueness, choosing unity with the whole over the isolation and limited viewpoint that over-developed individualism has place on him. At the same time, however, such an individual will be able to see himself also as a separate unit: a cell in the total organism, both self-contained and a necessary part of the society. Freed from cultural and social biases, the new man will be able to appreciate the diversity of his species, glorying in the unique forms of expression that different societies have created.

In this Sufist-inspired world, man's levels of evolution will be limited only by an individual's powers of development. From physical to mental to spiritual states, a soul will exist in the aspect that best expresses its understanding. Like the citizens of Marriages' zones, a person's ability to ascend or descend will depend on his insight. Spiritual illumination will derive not only from literature, but also from mathematics and art, physics and music, as their messages reach centers in his mind that are barely conceived of now. Through the multitude of inputs that will be available, men will finally develop the mental "organs of perception" that Sufists predict, a communion via telepathy, on a higher frequency and of a richer variety of expression than mere thought can convey.

Each book in Canopus in Argos' quintet contributes a different insight in order to create this composite picture. Shikasta introduces the emissaries whose understanding of Canopean perfection contrasts so strongly with the earthly blindness that they fight to overcome. Despite the hell that Shikasta has been reduced to by its own weakness and Shammat's embodied evil, Canopus still holds the dream of paradise that Rohanda once promised. Shikasta asserts that the desperate battles raging in the world today will not end humanity; beyond the coming destruction, a world of harmony will emerge where humanity can once again begin to achieve its Sufist potential for perfection.

Marriages contrasts Shikasta's bleak picture of temporary failure with its vision of an attainable harmonic development. Marriages' fantasy tale offers an allegory of spiritual illumination through its evocation of the ascending zones of potentiality available to its citizens. The migrations that Al*Ith and Ben Ata make--from the physical to mental and spiritual states--become representative of the mystic opportunities for development that Sufist learning may offer.

The Sirian Experiments brings man down to earth again. Through Ambien II's eyes, the Sirian aspect of man's failure is re-emphasized in no uncertain terms. Her perception of the "existential problem" which condemns Ambien's empire to constant turmoil parallels Lessing's view of a Western world sickened by its materialistic excesses, ready for the better way that a Sufist understanding of existence will provide. Ambien's own

growth under Canopus' tutelage offers glimpses into the threatening but exhilarating "possibilities" that await an individual who is ready to be liberated by Sufism's mystical philosophy.

Next, Planet Eight offers another tale of enlightenment achieved. Related by Planet Eight's Doeg, the Representative who is both one soul and the sum of all his people, this grim tale of a culture's slow physical extinction ultimately becomes a story of metamorphosis into higher understanding. The Doeg's chronicle of progression through the stages of grief that precede death reflects the darker route to evolution that Lessing's Sufism also suggests. Beyond the unknown, fear of which limits Planet Eight's understanding, lies an existence infinitely richer than a man's limited mind can comprehend. Planet Eight's world of ice is merely the departure point for Canopus, the heaven of Sufi potential.

Concluding her picture of Canopus, Lessing returns to earth one final time, describing the rhetoric and futile politics that have prevented the Volyen Empire from achieving stability, much less evolution toward higher spiritual states. In The Sentimental Agents, her satire of political and oratorical self-deception, Lessing mocks the delusions that will always thwart man's progress until a clearer way of thought is introduced. Klorathy, Canopus' benevolent emissary, is ultimately successful in showing his Volyens a way toward stability; Sufism, as Doris Lessing intimates, can do the same for mankind.

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